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PAGE 68 //FEATURE //GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

GTA SAN ANDREAS

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PLUS: SAM HOUSER, THE ORIGINAL ROCKSTAR

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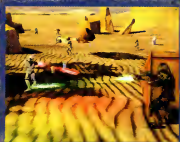
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PlayStation 2



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CONTENTS



ISSUE

20

068 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

→ GMR digs deep to find info you won't read anywhere else

074 INTERVIEW: ROCKSTAR'S SAM HOUSER

→ The president of the company talks about the future of GTA

076 GTA: A HISTORY

→ We take a look back at the series' evolution

FRONT

GMA NEWS NETWORK

025 STARCRAFT: GHOST DELAYED

→ Strange things are afoot as the game changes hands

026 NINJA GAIKEN LEVELS UP

→ Team Ninja adds a pinch of spice to make everything nice

028 STYLE AND LACK OF SUBSTANCE

→ Gamer chic and MMO sick

029 TALENT: BROOKE BURKE

→ Need for Speed Underground 2 gets sexy

030 SCREEN: AZUMANGA DAICH

→ Cute girls, big laughs



NEXT

INCOMING GAMES

- 039 OUTRUN 2
- 042 FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE
- 044 RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL
- 045 POKÉMON LEAFGREEN & FIREFRED
- 046 DESTROY ALL HUMANS
- 048 PHANTOM BRAVE
- 049 KING OF FIGHTERS: MAXIMUM IMPACT
- 050 PIKMIN 2
- 052 MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION
- 054 BLINK 2: MASTERS OF TIME & SPACE
- 056 HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!
- 058 CAPCOM FIGHTING EVOLUTION
- 060 GRADIUS V
- 062 CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR
- 064 GALLEON
- 065 TEKKEN 5
- 066 X-MEN: LEGENDS
- 067 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



REGULARS

THE GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

PEOPLE 014

→ Who's going to sew these onto our uniforms?

POST 016

→ You write, we snipe. Easy!

GAMEPORT: ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES 026

→ Plan your busy fall buying season

CHARTS 032

→ They probably won't surprise you

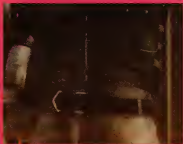
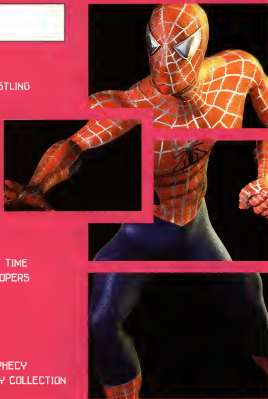
GAME GEEZER 110

→ He's got a growth on his butt

NOW

REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST

- 079 SPIDER-MAN 2
- 081 RIVER CITY RANSOM EX
- 081 SHOWDOWN: LEGENDS OF WRESTLING
- 082 ATHENS 2004
- 082 ASTRO BOY
- 083 ORIV3R
- 084 SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW
- 085 LINEAGE II
- 086 Madden NFL 2005
- 087 ESPN NFL 2K5
- 087 NCAA FOOTBALL 2005
- 088 CRIMSON TEARS
- 088 GROUND CONTROL II
- 091 STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME
- 092 COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS
- 092 PUYO POP FEVER
- 093 AMAZING ISLAND
- 093 RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW
- 094 ECHO NIGHT: BEYOND
- 094 HAMTARD: HAM-HAM GAMES
- 095 TODD MCFARLANE'S EVIL PROPHECY
- 095 STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION
- 096 GHOSTHUNTER



MORE

TIPS, CODES, ARCHIVES

RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW
→ First-person strategies

AL 106

→ Play Karaoke Revolution 2 in GMR style

CONNECT 108

→ City of Heroes meets its match



WHAT UP WITH 1UP?

The new, improved, and altogether fascinating 1UP.com is here. Tired of reading our loathsome ramblings? Start talking back on your own blog! Join an anti-GMR club...we can take it! If you actually like us, just cruise our editors' blogs. Of course, the sum 'n' Web-fresh content that 1UP.com has been providing you with remains the staple. Bon appetit!

THIS MONTH ON GMR.1UP.COM

Just in case someone steals your copy of GMR—after all, that sexy San Andreas cover is too hard to resist—remember that you can always find the latest info at GMR.1UP.com. There's also piping hot news from the 1UP.com staff. Coming up on August 9, check out an interview with Naoto Ohshima, the creator of Blinx 2, a perfect match with the preview on page 54.

BLOG HEAVEN

Want to know more about GMR's editors? Read their 1UP.com blogs!



GMR SKIP.1UP.COM

Andrew poses deep, philosophical questions. Or maybe he just makes fun of forum kiddies. Who's to say there's any difference?

Quote: "In this world, there exists good and bad."



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Christian, on the other hand, seems content to focus on classic gaming and top-notch manga. Quote: "There's just something so on about Mega Man X. The original SNES game, I mean."

BOARDIN'

Visit <http://boards.1up.com> and you can join the craziness at GMR's "Nuclear War on the Dance Floor" official board. Whether you want to hook up with Milkman on Final Fantasy XI or you're into the EB deals in the magazine, this is the place to post your thoughts. Of course, there's a full slate of boards out there on every gaming-related topic, so you don't have limit yourself... Get posting.

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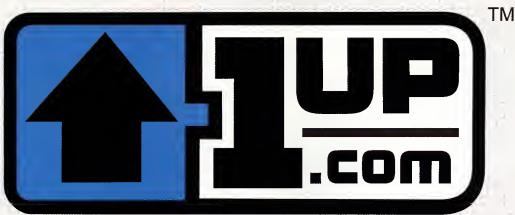


YOUR GAMES



Get YOUR GameFace on.





Get clubbing! Join clubs or create your own and invite all of your friends.

MY CLUBS (7)

- EGM Fans**
Members: 364
JOIN THIS CLUB
- Shoe's World**
Members: 496
JOIN THIS CLUB
- SOCOM II Club**
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JOIN THIS CLUB

YOUR CLUBS

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YOUR FRIENDS

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DAN'S 1UP JOURNAL

My day at the office

Some of you realize that we asked for more than "fun with great content and witty dialogue" to make it into the 1UP Journal. The Journal of 1UP is getting its second redesign soon. The site will need a more more professional look that, which it will be able to provide.

The Journal of 1UP is a place where you can share your thoughts on the latest in gaming. When the Journal is ready, we'll be able to provide you with a more professional look. The Journal is a place where you can share your thoughts on the latest in gaming. When the Journal is ready, we'll be able to provide you with a more professional look.

Next generation Consoles

The generation is pretty strong, isn't it? The Journal has quite a few articles, but nothing that expects to be a game that is a game. The Journal has quite a few articles, but nothing that expects to be a game that is a game. The Journal has quite a few articles, but nothing that expects to be a game that is a game.

YOUR JOURNAL



We're all here. Join us at 1UP.com.



GMR

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SAN ANDREAS WILL BE RATED M

Assuming the pattern holds from previous incarnations of the series *GTA: San Andreas* will feature extreme violence replete with shootings, beatings, carjackings, and a lot of killing. Of course, the *F* word and plenty of other epithets will be in full splendor.

It's for these reasons and others that *San Andreas* will likely be rated M for Mature by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board. Here's how the ESRB defines the M rating from www.esrb.com.

"Titles rated M - Mature have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence, and/or strong language."

I'm pointing this out because there are a lot of you who are genuinely concerned about the videogames children play. Obviously, not all games are appropriate for kids, which is why games are rated in the first place. Ratings are useful consumer tools that give you an idea of what you'd be bringing home and for whom it's intended.

GTA: San Andreas is clearly marked as a game appropriate for adults, not children. This isn't a value judgment, it's a fact. What you do with this information is up to you, but now you know.

For those planning to play it, get ready for possibly the best *GTA* to date. *GMR* executive editor James Mielke spent some quality time with *San Andreas* and the folks at Rockstar and filed his exclusive report, which we're rating A for awesome. **A-**

Tom Byron, Editor-in-Chief, Troop Leader



GATHER 'ROUND THE CAMPFIRE, KIDS! IT'S TIME FOR SOME GOOD OL' MERITOCRACY

Scoutmaster Byron would like to present the following badges to the staff of *GMR*. Congratulations on your dedication and hard work, you truly are the best and brightest of America's future.



JAMES MIELKE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

For never giving up on his most precious hopes and dreams, even when clouds of gloom gathered round to make him brown, James is awarded the badge of Sunshine and Happiness. He'll now forever ride the Magical Rainbow on his way to the Enchanted Land of Wonderlul.



CARRIE SHEPHERO MANAGING EDITOR

For saving the lives of 82 drowning sailors from the sinking ruins of a battleship in the North Atlantic, losing her hearing and right arm due to hypothermia, Carrie Shephero is awarded with...wait, there's no badge for that. Instead, here is a badge with a squirrel on it. Isn't he cute?



ANDREW PFISTER ASSOCIATE EDITOR

For unmercifully smiting his enemies with bolts hurled down high above Mt. Olympus among the choir of Zeus and Athena, Andrew has wisely earned the badge for Ancient Greek Vengeance. And since his enemies consisted of rival Boy Scout Troop 307, he is additionally awarded with the badge of Gang Warfare.



CHRISTIAN NUTT ASSOCIATE EDITOR

For accelerating through all yellow traffic lights, Christian is hereby awarded with the badge for Only Being 17 Minutes Late Involving 19 Minutes Late. However, the badge for Unintentional Vehicular Manslaughter remains withheld, pending the outcome of People of California v. Nutt.



GERRY SERRANO ART DIRECTOR

For bringing 48 rolls of double-ply toilet paper to the recent *GMR* camping trip, Gerry is awarded with the badge for Taking a Crap in the Woods and Not Feeling Awkward Afterward. But the awarding of this badge is under official review, considering Gerry takes 48 rolls of toilet paper wherever he goes.



CAROLINE KING DESIGNER

This final badge is not granted for Caroline's outstanding achievement in the field of deliciousness, rather it is awarded based on her deadly proficiency with common household utensils in her official test. Caroline placed 58 out of 48 forks in our "targets" back and spooned out a record 13 eyeballs in one minute. Congratulations all!

GMR

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POST

BECAUSE WITHOUT YOU, WE ARE NOTHING.
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BOYS BEHAVING BADLY

The Geezer speaks for me when he talks about the trash talk on Xbox Live. I'm to the point of handing in my headset and giving up my gamertag because of the verbal nonsense going on. Excessive obscenities are not only distasteful and boorish, but they are also the ultimate sign of disrespect. Sure, it's in the movies, on television, and in music, but that still doesn't mean I have to like it and tolerate it. There are few enough words in the English language, but I would think that gamers would be as selective with them as they would with their games. Crude behavior isn't limited to "Xbox Dead" either. You can go to many gamer groups on Yahoo or dedicated websites and get the same treatment. I pay my Xbox Live subscription to play games; if I want bad attitudes and bad language, I'll rent an R-rated movie.

—Paul King

ROCK OF AGES

After reading the little blurb about Nobuo Uematsu and the concert he

gave during the week of E3 (GMR #19), I was wondering if GMR had ever covered anything about any of the really great videogame cover bands that are out there today. Bands such as Press Play on Tape, Minibosses, and Temp Sound Solutions are all doing their own wonderful renditions of classic songs that we know and love. Then again, is Commodore 64 too old for most GMR readers?

—Matt Friedly

We haven't yet explored the world of videogame cover bands, but we will say that **The Minibosses' rendition of the Castlevania, Contra, and Metroid themes are among the best game tunes we've heard. Check out www.minibosses.com for more.**

HANDHELDS ACROSS AMERICA

On the subject of DS versus PSP, there're a few points I've been wondering about that could either kill or save either system (I'm rooting for the DS so far). First, does the PSP have a rechargeable battery? I've heard that the DS does, and

that's good news. But judging by the projected battery life for the PSP, if I have to buy new batteries to watch one LOTR film...yeah. Second, the DS is the very picture of innovation. If some company could figure out how to put everything to use and give a blueprint for future games to come, DS could really rock. But, I have yet to see something really innovative. Third, the PSP looks pretty fragile, and I've had problems with Sony durability, while I've dropped my Game Boy many a time and have yet to have any problems. Handhelds have got to be able to withstand some punishment if they're going to be rocking around my backpack. So, I've got my bets on the DS being the best overall, but Sony already has a huge fan base. Who knows how this is going to turn out? Good luck to both companies, and may the best handheld win!

—iamadoddobird

Nintendo handed Sony the console market when it backed out of the SNES deal; if it continues to underestimate the competition, I can only see Nintendo handing the handheld market over to Sony as well. The DS appears to be



VS.



→ PSP and DS: Unwilling warriors?

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

Did you know that at the new IUP.com, you can have your own weblog, clubs, and network of friends? You totally can! We've also moved the old boards over to the new site. Just go to IUP.com, click on Socialize, then Boards. You'll

see the GMR link somewhere in the middle. This month, the MBUS discuss Nintendo's release of NES classics on GBA.

I love it. I got the classic NES SP and it's great. A little nostalgia never hurt anyone! ...ghosty

It's baffling how Nintendo can do something as awesome as give away the Zelda Collector's

Edition for free and then go and release just the first Zelda for \$20. ...Kris_P

Let's not forget that half of those games have already been rereleased for the GBA—as e-reader cards. Why would I pay \$20 for something I've already bought for \$5, not to mention the original NES games themselves? ...DJ_

Zelda, Mario Bros., Excitebike, and a couple others are free if you own Animal Crossing. Twenty dollars just seems like a rip-off. ...ViewtifulSean

I remember paying \$60 for the NES versions when they were released, so I can definitely dig that they are not only portable, but also only \$20.

...Sciler →



Solar Power

FIFTH DAWN

also available online

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based on a gimmick, and not one that will be usable in just any game. Games have to be specifically designed to take advantage of the new "features" built into the DS, whereas the PSP is built on the same thing that made PlayStation 2 successful: software. The PSP is a device that is meant to play games, not a gimmick that expects a new type of game to be developed for it.

Not only that, but developers such as Square Enix, Rockstar, and Capcom already have their key franchises on PS2. I can't see it being easier for them to port those games to the DS than it would be for them to port them to the PSP. That said, I think the PSP will come out on top.

David Rose

IT'S A-WHOP

Hey, I have a personally upsetting story.... It was the second-to-last day of school and I had just finished my exam, so I went over to sit with my friends, who were talking about videogames. Of course, they were just talking about Xbox and PS2, not the underrated GameCube (which I own). I was talking with them for about 10 minutes when my friend said something about Mario Kart, and the next thing I heard was "Mario sucks!" Then the rest of them agreed...I just got pissed. We got into a huge argument about the god of videogame characters.

Anyway, I wanna know what happened to everyone's love for Mario. Have you noticed the lack of respect toward him? If so, what do you have to say about it?

Adam Thomas

It's the unstoppable march of time, we're afraid. It's difficult to maintain a high profile when Nintendo puts out only one flagship game every five or so years. Contrast that to a new *GTA* or *Halo* every two years (or even a new *Mario* every couple of years back in the '80s and '90s), and considering the industry's overall skew toward older gamers, it's not really

I dunno. I can't see myself forking out what they are asking for the classic games for GBA. I already own most of the ones I'm interested in for my NES or as unlockables in other N64/GBA games. If they were cheaper or were games I hadn't somehow gotten my hands on, then it'd be a lot more tempting. *Irishmatt*

Honest to say, I'm a little disappointed. I mean, really, one game per cartridge? You can fit FAR more than



→ Is Mario going the way of Mickey Mouse?

surprising that Mario is no longer king of the world. That's not to say that people still aren't excited for Miyamoto's next Mario game—well, just haven't heard anything about it yet. Perhaps if Nintendo started treating it like a big deal again, then everyone else would follow suit...

LIFE GOES ON

Just want to thank you for including the My Life in Vana Diel column in your magazine. It has quickly become my reason for looking forward to my issue of *GMR* each month. I am an avid (REALLY avid) player of the game and would sorely miss reading Milkman's journal if it were taken out.

Kaiser Pollux

This is but one of the hundreds [literally!] of e-mails that poured in after Milky wondered aloud about what you all thought of My Life in Vana Diel in *GMR* #18. Rest assured that the column was never in danger of cancellation, though you should prepare to accept the reality that all good things must eventually come to an end. Until then, though, long live the Roundabouts! *14*

that *Ang* at *AD* bumps a pop? Yeah, I'm quite disappointed....

Arminia

I thought about it a bit more and I like it more now. Why not just enjoy what's there? And if not, just try to track down the original ones. Then hook up that dusty old NES and play for a few seconds before it breaks down.

cheesebuster *14*

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AD INDEX

AMERICA ONLINE	http://www.aol.com	street
Atari	www.atari.com	31, 111
Capcom U.S.A. Inc.	www.capcom.com	6-7, 39
Codemasters Inc.	www.codemastersusa.com	45
Electronic Arts Inc.	www.ea.com	8-9, 15, 27, 36-37, 61, 99, 101, 102
Fuji Soft Real World	www.fuji.com	49
LucasArts Entertainment	www.lucasarts.com	2-3
Microsoft	www.microsoft.com	19
Namco Hometek	www.namco.com	4-5, 20-21
Random House	www.randomhouse.com	57
Sage Of America	www.sage.com	33
SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT	www.scea.com	22-23, 53
Take 2 Interactive	www.take2games.com	42
The Walt Disney Company	www.waltdisney.com	29
Tri-O Inc.	www.trio.com	113
U.S. ARMY ACCESSIONS COMMAND	www.armyaccessions.com	41
Wizards of the Coast	www.wizards.com	17, 35

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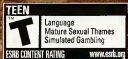
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HOT SHOTS TIPS

1

PuttCrusher04 on the Short Game

There are two places I like to blow off steam. One is the wrestling ring, where I see how high I can throw other wrestlers. The other is the putting green. A good putt depends on a proper grip. I grip the putter firmly, but just loose enough so I don't shatter it with my bare hands.



When it comes to putting, mental preparation is key. For me, bench-pressing a golf cart and a couple hundred push-ups usually do the trick.



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2

BunkerBreaker007 on Getting Out of the Sand

People always ask how I learned to conquer these mighty sand traps. I don't know. That's like asking how gale-force winds learn to blow just as a dude's ready to tee off. All I do know is that ever since I was a kid, I liked surfing near sand, sitting on sand, even eating sand. But that was on a dare.



Before attempting to get that ball out, thoroughly wax your wedge. Better too much than not enough.



Swing under the ball and lift it out of the sand. Then do a thorough toe check for any signs of sand jam.



PlayStation.2



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GMR NEWS NETWORK

IN THE NEWS

STARCRRAFT: GHOST DELAYED

Nova sneaks from one developer to another

025

NINJA GAIDEN LEVELS UP

You thought you were done. Think again

026

STYLE AND LACK OF SUBSTANCE

Atari cartridges reborn as two more MMOs die

028

TALENT: BROOKE BURKE

We engage in a racy conversation

029

SCREEN: AZUMANGA DAIDH

The best anime series you can't pronounce the name of

030





→ **StarCraft:** Ghost's delay and the dismissal of Nihilistic are not its only problems. While the Xbox version ran smoothly at May's E3, the PS2 version of the game lagged a step behind. We hope that Swingin' Ape can take care of business.



GIVING UP THE GHOST

BLIZZARD EXORCISES STARCRAFT: GHOST DEVELOPER. SUMMONS NEW SPIRIT U.S.A.

Nobody announces new games in June or July. But what is announced, more quietly, is bad news. Almost two years after *StarCraft: Ghost's* unveiling, Blizzard has revealed that the game will be delayed until 2005. More shockingly, it has cut loose Nihilistic, the game's developer.

"Nihilistic is contracted to begin work on another project in the months ahead," explains Blizzard's John Lagrave, the game's producer. "It was mutually determined that now would be the best time for them to complete their work on *StarCraft: Ghost*." This is an unusual

move on Blizzard and Nihilistic's part, as developers are typically contracted by the game, not by time.

But we're not too worried. Swingin' Ape Studios, which debuted with 2003 sleeper *Metal Arms*, will be picking up where Nihilistic left off. In a statement, Blizzard president Mike Morhaime said, "We're confident that this partnership will result in titles that achieve the level of quality that players have come to expect from Blizzard products."

Given how good *Metal Arms* was, this seems plausible. Interestingly, the statement speaks beyond *Ghost*—

Blizzard plans to tap Swingin' Ape for future "collaborative development of multiplayer titles."

Swingin' Ape has its work cut out for it. Some gamers complained that the feel of *Ghost* changed drastically from one year to the next; the emphasis on stealth and the tight connection with the *StarCraft* universe of 2003's version was replaced by run-n-gun gameplay in 2004, leading to confusion and trepidation about the game's prognosis.

Lagrave indicates that more changes are coming, explaining, "We determined that, given the gameplay expectations for

titles in the tactical-action genre, we needed to modify the game's design prior to release. At this time, it's too early to discuss what changes will be made. We plan to announce further details regarding gameplay specifics at a later date."

While the game's fate may be frustrating, PC gamers are well used to Blizzard's long development schedules. Console gamers are acclimated to timely ship dates, though, and Blizzard is navigating uncharted waters with *Ghost's* latest delay. Lagrave states simply, "We will not release a game until it's ready to be released." ■

GAIDEN GROWS

TEAM NINJA PUMPS UP THE JAM
JAPAN

➔ Team Ninja is substantially enhancing *Ninja Gaiden* via a free Xbox Live download. If you've already beaten the game, prepare to whip it out again—these new options don't just enhance the game, they're integral to the second round of the Master Ninja Tournament that Tecmo is running.

To answer one of the biggest criticisms gamers have with *Gaiden*, a fully user-controlled camera has been added on the right stick. Ryu also packs a new weapon, the bo staff. New enemies and bosses have been added, and the A.I. of all of them has been upgraded. The patch will be available in early August. 1E



[BLIPS]

EA gets Stranger



● Developer Oddworld Inhabitants, best known for *Munch's Oddysee* at the Xbox launch, has announced a new publisher for its latest game. Electronic Arts will publish *Stranger*, assumed to be a casualty of the game bloodbath that followed Ed Fries' departure from EA early this year. It will appear on Xbox and PS2 in 2005. 1E

Two more Matrices

● Atari head Bruno Bonnell recently let slip that Atari is planning two more *Enter the Matrix* games—one for the current crop of systems, and another to debut in the next generation. We don't yet know if *ETM* developer Shiny will craft the sequels or if the Wachowski siblings are holding the reins, but both seem safe bets. Rumor had placed *ETM2* at E3, but it didn't show. 1E

GAMEPORT UTILITY GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING.

✈ ARRIVALS COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
PS2	AUG	PHANTOM BRAVE Strategy gets spiritual.	🔥🔥🔥
GC	AUG	PIKMIN 2 Talk to your plants, then use them to kill.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
GC/PC/PS2/XB	AUG	MAOEN NFL 2005 Another year, another dollar.	🔥🔥🔥
PC	SEPT	HALF-LIFE 2 Did you buy a new rig yet?	🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB	SEPT	SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM Stock up on nonthreatening snacks. No Twinkies, then.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB	SEPT	BURNOUT 3 Reserve a month for crashing your car alone.	🔥🔥🔥
PC	SEPT	EVERQUEST II Remind people they won't be seeing you for awhile.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	SEPT	SLY COOPER 2: BANDO OF THIEVES Stealing \$40 from your wallet.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	SEPT	MONSTER HUNTER We don't need your stinking PS0!	🔥🔥🔥
XB	SEPT	FABLE Roleplay good or evil without the need for Star Wars.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
PC/PS2/XB	SEPT	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT Republic commandos and Jedi Knights.	🔥🔥
GC	SEPT	DONKEY KONGA Bang a bong.	🔥🔥🔥
GBA	SEPT	KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES It'll help pass the time till KHD, at the very least.	🔥🔥🔥
GC	OCT	PAPER MARIO 2 He's back, he's flat, and he's ready to rock.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	OCT	COWBOY BEBOP Frog Valentino's missing minigame unconfirmed.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	OCT	GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS We saved this for last so you'd read the whole list.	🔥🔥🔥🔥

✈ DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC	TALES OF SYMPHONIA GameCube's best RPG so far this year! Oh, wait.	8 ¹⁰
XB	THE CHRONICLES OF RICOICK Maybe Vin should stick to games.	9 ¹⁰
XB	FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR Pvt. Roy G. Biv reporting for duty.	8 ¹⁰
XB	SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY From the same nonsense naming school as Pandora Tomorrow.	4 ¹⁰
PC	CITY OF HEROES Grab your lights.	8 ¹⁰
PS2	BUJINGA! THE FORSAKEN CITY Unlike other magazines, we take Gackt very seriously.	7 ¹⁰
PS2	KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOL. 2 Get into the groove.	8 ¹⁰
GC/PS2	MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION GameCube for 2D fans and kids too young for NES.	9 ¹⁰
GBA	SONIC ADVANCE 3 He's still got some thing left.	8 ¹⁰
GBA	MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 4 Blink and they'll have MMBNS ready.	8 ¹⁰
PS2/XB	MLB SLUGFEST: LODGE0 Baseball and violence not so common otherwise.	7 ¹⁰
PS2/XB	PSI-OPS: THE MINGOGATE CONSPIRACY Get these guys to make an Akira game.	8 ¹⁰
PS2	WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2 Like Choose Your Own Adventure with more violence.	6 ¹⁰
PS2	SMASH COURT PRO TENNIS 2 Needs a few more lessons.	6 ¹⁰
PC/XB	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS Stealth gets medieval on your ass.	8 ¹⁰
GC/PS2/XB	HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN Let out on parole a bit too early.	7 ¹⁰

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GMR SCOURS THE GLOBE



TOO MUCH MONSTER

The Japanese do not screw around when it comes to two things: preserving classic pop culture and making money off of its fans. The latest and perhaps the most impressive example of this is the just-announced *Godzilla Final Box* from Toho.

Celebrating the end of the massive lizard's decades-long career, *Godzilla Final Box* contains 27 movies chronicling the tribulations of the boss beast. Three bonus discs are also included, as well as an empty case for the eventual release of *Godzilla Final Wars*, the 50th anniversary and final *Godzilla* film, which hits Japanese theaters in December. The *Godzilla Final Box* will be released on April 22, 2005 for a price of 99,750 yen (around \$922). ☼

CLICKS

GO HERE NOW, PLEASE



KITERETSUJUP/ON/GROW3/

If the Japanese game market is slowing down, maybe it's because innovation is bleeding into the Web. Case in point: Grow, a Flash game that blends nurturing with arcade-style scoring for an addictive mix. The site has more games, too. ☼

CART SMART

TURNING OLD GAMES INTO NEW GEAR
U.S.A.

➔ If goth-kid mall fave Hot Topic is any indication, videogame kitsch is high fashion right now. Now you can proclaim your passion beyond T-shirts, with compacts and cases made from Atari 2600 cartridges.

These cool containers are \$12 from Yakmala Products, available at yakmala.com. "I actually have lots of stupid ideas. This seems to be one of those so-stupid-it's-brilliant ideas, which are rare for me," creator Jason Alvino says.

With '80s chic big, the old Atari carts make sense. But why just Atari? "I actually have designed something with NES carts," reveals Alvino, who has worked in the art departments of Sony Music and Tower Records. "I have also designed furniture and other accessories using similar materials, all of which I hope to start making soon. Keep checking that website!" ☼



OUT OF MMO

MORE ONLINE GAMES DROP LIKE FLIES

U.K./U.S.A.

➔ Following in the footsteps of Microsoft's cancellation of *True Fantasy Live Online*, two more massively multiplayer RPGs have vanished.

Despite sinking more than two years of work into *Warhammer Online*, a "difficult and painful decision" was reached to cancel the game, according to a statement on the game's official website (warhammeronline.com). Climax was the developer, and Sega Europe was listed as the publisher.

Electronic Arts soon followed suit. On June 30, the official site for *Ultima X: Odyssey* was likewise updated. David Yee, the game's producer, wrote: "As of today, development on *Ultima X: Odyssey* has ended. We feel that *Ultima Online* is where we need to focus our online efforts..." The seven-year-old *UO* was recently reissued in an anniversary edition; meanwhile, *UX* is the second *Ultima* MMO to be canceled, following 2001's *Ultima Online: Origins*.

Tough competition in the form of *World of Warcraft* and *EverQuest II*, both set to be re-

leased this year, is likely a driving force behind the cancellations. Other companies, such as Square Enix with its successful *Final Fantasy XI* and NCsoft with *City of Heroes* and *Lineage II*, have gobbled up what remains of the MMO pie.

Meanwhile, devoted fans of the unreleased titles are left in the cold. Upon the cancellation of *TFLQ*, one Japanese Xbox owner was moved to comment, "Thanks to you, this product is now waste matter. Please dispose of it." ☼

...The canceled *Ultima X: Odyssey*XBOX KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

EVAN SHAMOON

XCLUSIVITY

➔ When one speaks of games, a particular point that bears consideration is that of the exclusive. In terms of entertainment media, it's a concept that is entirely specific to videogames, whereby content is tied directly and restrictively to hardware.

Have you ever bought a CD only to realize that it doesn't work with your Aiva CD player? Or lasted after a DVD you couldn't have because it's a Sony exclusive and, alas, you own a Samsung? No, you haven't.

Much like the "banboy" mentality in general, the notion of exclusivity feels like a holdover from the days of the past, preventing the medium from reaching its true potential.

Standards exist within each platform, of course, but none are industry-wide. Microsoft's XNA, which standardizes development tools across MS platforms, would be a huge step in the right direction were it not for the obvious conflict of interest within gaming.

Breaking down these walls seems like an inevitable step on the road to mass entertainment; console exclusivity cheapens the videogame medium and ultimately leaves it idling one step further away from the art form we all want it to be. ☼

Evan Shamoon is an editor at Xbox Nation.

[TALENT]

* BROOKE BURKE

BUILT FOR SPEED

➔ You'd have to ask AAA for the exact figures, but it's safe to assume that drivers who are distracted by beautiful women cause a lot of car accidents. So having a really beautiful woman around really fast cars seems, well, counterproductive to say the least. Despite this fact, Electronic Arts has hired former *Wild On* and *Rank* hostess (and car enthusiast) Brooke Burke to star in *Need for Speed Underground 2*. Boys, start your engines.

GMR: In the game, your character runs an underground racing circuit. Do you have the organizational skills to handle such a complex operation?

BB: I'm a multitasker and the mother of two, so I think I could if I put my mind to it. But I'd want to do a bit of driving myself. I have a lust for fast cars. I've always been a car person. In fact, when I first spoke to the people at EA, we spent most of the time talking about cars. I don't think the people at EA knew how much I love them.

GMR: Does that mean you also love car games?

BB: Oh yeah. I was actually playing a lot of *Need for Speed Underground* before they asked me to be in the second one. I'm actually still playing it a lot.

GMR: Are you any good at it?

BB: I am now. Originally, it was a little intimidating because loving cars and loving to drive are totally different

from being a car expert, and I thought you'd have to be a car expert to really get good at it. But the game was actually really easy to grasp.

GMR: Being such a speed freak, do you have a tricked-out import car like the ones in *Need for Speed Underground 2*?

BB: I have a Ferrari Maranello, though it's not tricked out. It has some fancy wheels and tires, but otherwise everything on the car is original.

GMR: Now, we're assuming you've never engaged in an illegal street race....

BB: No, I haven't, but I do think it's unhealthy for a car of that capacity not to be driven fast once in a while. There's a nice drive from L.A. to Palm Springs that lends an opportunity to, well, get a little crazy. I'm a very safe driver, but I'd be lying if I said I never drove a hundred and...well, I'll leave it at that.

GMR: Do you think that racing games can make someone a better driver?

BB: Well, games do improve your hand-eye coordination, and part of being a good driver is being able to react fast, so yeah, maybe.

GMR: Game developers often travel internationally to scout locations for their games. As the former host of E!'s travel show *Wild On*, do you have any travel tips for someone who might be designing a new racing game?

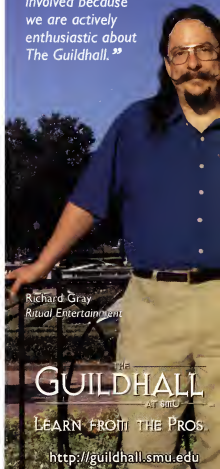
BB: Yeah, go to the *Autobahn*. One of the most amazing driving experiences I've ever had was driving a Porsche from Germany to Paris. It was unbelievable. I think driving is addicting, and to be able to really open up your car on such a beautiful road is just unbelievable. ♦



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MARK MACDONALD

MORE DS BS

➔ One of the best parts about this column is its ability to effect change: Remember when I called for Nintendo to bring the excellent Cube import *Puzzle Collection to the States?* Or the time I asked for a cool frequent-buyers club for the U.S. like the one Nintendo established in Japan?

Sure, some may say that neither of those things ever happened. And granted, they have a point. A good point, with no room for argument. Wait, what were we talking about? Oh yeah, the tweaks Nintendo should make to its dual-screen DS handheld before its release this fall.

An analog stick: Playing Mario 484 with a D-pad gets seriously painful after about two minutes. 3D games need 3D control—for the sake of thumbs everywhere. Nintendo, I beg of thee! **A spot to hold the touch-screen stylus:** Already promised—hello! Score one for us!

Bigger buttons: On the prototype DS, all the buttons were the size of Tic-Tacs. **Scrify the outer design a bit:** A little vague, yes, but fairly self-explanatory. **Finally, include the cool instant-messenger-like Pictochat program within the hardware itself:** So DS users can send messages and game invites to each other, Xbox Live style, while they are playing games. **E®**

Mark MacDonald is executive editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*.

[SCREEN]

AZUMANGA DAIOH
GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS

VOLUMES 1-3 AVAILABLE NOW // PRICE: \$29.95 // RATING: T

➔ Anyone who pays any attention to anime will note that in both Japan and the States, cute girls sell. Whether it's the buxom cast of *Love Hina* or punk-infused Haruko Haruhara of *FLCL*, there's a DVD dream girl for everyone. Increasingly, this has caused crafty creators to come up with series that focus on a large cast of cuties instead of just one main squeeze. Variety is, as they say, the spice of life.

Enter *Azumanga Daioh*. Its title—a pun on the creator's name (Kiyohiko Azuma) and its original medium (manga)—doesn't make a lot of sense, and the characters take the time to point that out during the first episode. This is not your average anime series.

Forget about robots, ninjas, or kids battling repugnantly cute monsters. *Azumanga Daioh* concentrates on the perfectly normal life of a group of high school students, the unlucky girls of Yukari Tanizaki's homeroom class.

With a few exceptions, this is a pretty typical group of kids—you've got

the ditzy one, the goofy one, and the quiet one. But when you add in a precocious 10-year-old and the fact that Yukari is more than a little unbalanced, you get something that's funnier than the sum of its parts.

It's hard to explain just what makes *Azumanga Daioh* so special. When pressed for a plot summary, "high school girls acting stupid" is about as good as it gets. Each episode is broken up into smaller mini-episodes that follow the thoughts or activities of a certain character.

Whether it's the ditzy Osaka trying to hold it together in class or being afflicted with hiccups and her friends' terrible cures, or the misadventures of Miss Sakaki as she tries to befriend a neighborhood cat, the stories in *Azumanga Daioh* always have two things in common: They're personal and they're hilarious. It doesn't sound like much to describe it, but thanks to clear, expressive artwork and great comedic timing, *Azumanga Daioh* provides the biggest laughs in a comedy series this year—and does it without the gimmicks

so many anime series rely on.

The first three volumes of *Azumanga Daioh* are currently available, with plans for three more to be released in the future. The first

disc is available with a collectors' box set for the fan who must have it all, and the original comic series which spawned the show is also being published Stateside by AOV Manga. **E®**

PLAYSTATION
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THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU
DON'T HAVE TO!

JOHN DAVISON

SPECIAL ED

➔ At last, after what seems like years of waiting, U.S. game publishers are starting to understand the allure of limited editions.

Folks in Japan and Europe have been happily buying funky special editions with fancy packaging like that awesome *Metal Gear Solid* box for the past six or seven years, but it always feels like we're left with the bare minimum here. It doesn't help that we always seem to get the worst possible cover art as well. Remember *ko?*

EA Sports appears to be kicking off the new culture of collectors' editions with Madden NFL 2003. The special version, which will set you back an extra \$10, is essentially a celebration of 15 years of football craziness. The package includes "classic" versions of the game from the 16-bit era, as well as two different PS1 versions. There's also a trivia challenge with 1,000 questions, a "greatest moments" video, a bunch of behind-the-scenes videos, and a thing about the game's music. All this, plus the new game as well, obviously.

It will also apparently be wrapped up in what EA tells me is "unique packaging," although the company hasn't specified if it will be quite as cool as the groovy tin box that *Evangelion* got to enjoy with the *Hearts of Iron* 2 special edition. **E®**

John Davison is editor-in-chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

IN STORES SEPTEMBER

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AND IF THERE WAS A GIRL WHO HANDED OUT
TROPHIES, SHE'D BE UGLY TOO.

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PlayStation.2

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PC
KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JEFF GREEN

A FINE PORT

➔ Remember when "port" was a dirty word? When the notion of playing a console game on a PC would make you turn up your nose like you just get a whiff of your brother's socks?

Well, those days are gone, my friend. Whether you like it or not, if you play PC games, you better suck it up and accept the fact that many new games are going to hit the Xbox, PS2, and GameCube first. Even worse, some of those games—like, say, *Halo* and *KOTOR*, to give two egregious examples—may be games originally destined for the PC.

But, you know, deal with it. Games are big business now, with most titles in the hands of a few gigantic publishers, all of whom need million-selling titles just to break even. This means "PC-exclusive" titles are just going to happen much less frequently—since even the biggest PC games won't sell nearly as well as a hit on the consoles.

This doesn't mean that PC exclusives are dead—not by a long shot. Just look at Blizzard's library for the most compelling example, or most of the many massive multiplayer games. The bottom line for me, however, is that it no longer pays to be a platform snob. Can't we all just get along, or at least play each other's games? ☺

—Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

GMR CHARTS

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR JUNE '04

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TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR These wacky full spectrum warriors get into heaps of trouble!	XB	8
02	THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK Hey, Mr. Diesel, maybe you should stick to games.	XB	9
03	ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES GC And we all scoffed at connectivity.	8	
04	SPIDER-MAN 2 This was not a surprise.	XB	8
05	DRIV3R Or this.	PS2	5
06	SPIDER-MAN 2 Or this.	PS2	8
07	DRIV3R Are we seeing double?	XB	5
08	THE LEGEND OF ZELDA Nintendo makes another mint off a game from 1986.	GBA	NR
09	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW Apparently, stealth isn't quite as cool on PS2.	PS2	9
10	SUPER MARIO BROS. You have to buy something to go with the sexy NES GBA SP.	GBA	NR

PS2 TOP 10

	SCORE
01 DRIV3R	5
02 SPIDER-MAN 2	8
03 SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	9
04 HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	7
05 MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION	9
06 FRONT MISSION 4	8
07 XIII	6
08 MVP BASEBALL 2004	9
09 FIGHT NIGHT 2004	9
10 SHREK 2	5

XBOX TOP 10

	SCORE
01 FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR	8
02 THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK	9
03 SPIDER-MAN 2	8
04 DRIV3R	5
05 HALO	10
06 PSI-OPS: THE MINOGATE CONSPIRACY	8
07 SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	4
08 THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	8
09 METAL SLUG 3	8
10 HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	7

PC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 CITY OF HEROES	8
02 JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	TBD
03 ULTIMA ONLINE: 7TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION	NR
04 THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	8
05 FAR CRY	7
06 LINEAGE II: THE CHAOTIC CHRONICLE	5
07 RISE OF NATIONS	8
08 HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	NR
09 COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	5
10 BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	9

GBA TOP 10

	SCORE
01 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA	NR
02 SUPER MARIO BROS.	NR
03 MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG	7
04 SONIC ADVANCE 3	8
05 DUEL MASTERS	NR
06 SHINING FORCE	7
07 DONKEY KONG	NR
08 SHREK 2	NR
09 HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	6
10 MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR	9

GC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES	8
02 MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION	9
03 HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	7
04 SPIDER-MAN 2	8
05 SHREK 2	5
06 CUSTOM ROBO	8
07 HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE	8
08 POKÉMON COLOSSEUM	8
09 SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9
10 LUIGI'S MANSION	7

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PlayStation 2



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GAMEPLANNER | AUGUST 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE, SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

COULD THIS BE THE MONTH OF OUR DOOM?

SUNDAY

01

Today, Italy celebrates the feast of the Quintana. So if you're Italian, dress up in your best Renaissance fare garb and hit someone with a stick.



MONDAY

02

Today's military release Werline Command: Battle for Europe for your personal computer.

09 Less than a month to go before the regular season kicks off, so pick up Madden 2005 for GBA, GameCube, PS2, and Xbox. It'll make the wait go faster.

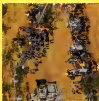
16

Get your quarters ready, because the Street Fighter Anniversary Collection is now available. Too bad they saved online play for the Xbox version.



23

A Hydra Thunder/Rush 2009 while Kohan 2 makes the PC main.



30

Today's grand release! Alundra 2 is now out for GameCube.



TUESDAY

03

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 2: Black Arrow is out for sure on Xbox, and it's entirely possible that the PC version of Doom 3 will be available as well.

10

ESPRIMO, 2005 (PS2, XBL, Game Boy Advance, GBA, PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL) is now on store shelves.

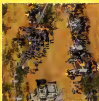
17

Mini Star Wars (GBA, PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL) is now on store shelves.



24

Political Machines (PC), Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL), Terminator 3: The Redemption (PC, PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL), and Amazing Island (PC) are out now



31

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL), Terminator 3: The Redemption (PC, PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL), and Amazing Island (PC) are out now



THURSDAY

05



12



19

Mini Star Wars (GBA, PS2, XBL, PS2, XBL) is now on store shelves.



26



FRIDAY

06

In Don't Mess With the Dragon King, actors were actually dropped into the ocean with real sharks. If only we could do that to those responsible for the Helix.

13

The sequel that millions of sci-fi nerds have been waiting for is finally here: The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement. There's also some sort of Predator movie out today, too.

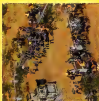
20

On the day Hungary observes Szent Istvan napja, az államalapulas as az uj jenydr unyompe, which celebrates the first Christian king and the first bread of the harvest. Word



27

Because the world demanded it, Ancestral Hunt for the Blood Drunk opens in theaters nationwide. No Ice Cube, J-Lo, or Jay Wright Bush



SATURDAY

08



15

The sequel that millions of sci-fi nerds have been waiting for is finally here: The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement. There's also some sort of Predator movie out today, too.

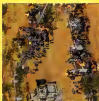
21

On the day Hungary observes Szent Istvan napja, az államalapulas as az uj jenydr unyompe, which celebrates the first Christian king and the first bread of the harvest. Word



28

Because the world demanded it, Ancestral Hunt for the Blood Drunk opens in theaters nationwide. No Ice Cube, J-Lo, or Jay Wright Bush



If you thought this month had for your gaming budget, just wait until September. And October. And November. And . . .

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Here at GMR, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about each game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game in progress is looking. They're snapshots. If we're not very excited about a game, it gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

BLINK 2: MASTERS OF TIME & SPACE	X8	DS4
CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR	GC/PS2/X8	DS2
CAPCOM FIGHTING EVOLUTION	PS2/X8	DS8
DESTROY ALL HUMANS	PS2/X8	DS6
FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE	PS2/X8	DS2
GALLEON	X8	DS4
GRADIUS V	PS2	DS0
HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!	PS2	DS6
KING OF FIGHTERS: MAXIMUM IMPACT	PS2	DS4
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA	GC	DS2
MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION	GC/PS2	DS2
OUTRUN 2	X8	DS0
PHANTOM BRAVE	PS2	DS8
PIKMIN 2	GC	DS0
POKÉMON LEAFGREEN & FIRERED	GBA	DS4
RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL	PS2	DS4
TEKKEN 5	PS2	DS6
X-MEN: LEGENDS	GC/PS2/X8	DS6



RELEASE | OCTOBER

OUTRUN 2

COME ON BABY. DRIFT THE NIGHT AWAY

DEVELOPER: XB GAMES/SEGA MICROSOFT | DEVELOPER: AM2 | SOUND DIGITAL FOR XB VERSION



It's hard to put a finger on what makes *OutRun 2* so much fun. It's similar in that way to the original *OutRun*, which even 20 years ago wasn't a complex game. It was *Pole Position* with a girl in the passenger seat—but that can make all the difference.

This is gaming on the simplest level of fantasy fulfillment. A fast car, an open road, and a pretty girl along for the ride. On the surface, there's not much more to it than that. But does there need to be?

AM2's goal with *OutRun 2* is above all to make something "fun to drive," according to producer Makoto Osaki. From what we've seen, goal achieved.

It's easy to ponder the bigger picture of *OutRun*'s appeal at this point. Sumo Digital [the British studio contracted to handle the Xbox version] has the technical side of things well in hand. Already, the Xbox port of the Chihiro original is essentially perfect. The framerate doesn't skip, there's no draw-in

marring even the most expansive levels, and the Ferraris look as pretty as they do in the arcades.

Hammering together a solid port so quickly—Microsoft claims it took a mere four months—leaves plenty of time to pack in new features and extras. Already on the table are a challenge mode with extra drifting tests and handling trials, and online multiplayer for eight racers. When asked about other improvements—new stages, new cars [in addition to the existing eight Ferraris], and

progressive scan or widescreen support—Microsoft's reps currently offer only knowing smiles, but as we say, there's plenty of time.

The arcade experience alone is already fairly unique in the Sega racing pantheon. It's not like the manic *Super GT*, the bouncing *Sega Rally*, or the white-knuckle *Daytona 2*. No, *OutRun 2* feels more like a road trip than a competitive race. Blipping the brakes and swooping into a massive powerslide is as much about the sheer hell of it as it



is about shaving seconds off lap times. AM2's "continuous" tuning of the drift mechanics definitely shows. If you want a precision challenge, the more complex heart-attack mode—in which the lady in the passenger seat demands perfect drifts and precision passes—offers more demanding difficulty for the skilled player.

Heart attack began as a way of making the copilot more interactive, not just part of the scenery. "If this excited girl is sitting in the passenger

seat," says Osaki, "what would she ask you?" After tinkering with the idea of having her pick which stage to race, which didn't turn out to be much fun in practice, AM2 decided to go for more outlandish racing challenges. "OutRun is already an insane game in a good way—the car crashes and restarts as if nothing happened," Osaki explains. "So we can have her ask you to perform the unbelievable, can't we?"

Also unbelievable is the notion that OutRun 2 might have once

missed out on a home release. Its developers feared the American rental market would kill an arcade port's potential. But Sega of Europe pushed hard for the Xbox version (given the massive appeal of the Ferrari name in its market), and gamers worldwide can thank the company this winter. **B+**

GMR SAYS → Come OutRun 2's release time, we'll be powerliding as fast as we can to store shelves.

→ HOW HOT... | 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

ROSSO CORSA

→ "It's no exaggeration to say it's the most famous of car companies," says AM2's Osaki, talking of course about Ferrari. The prancing horses have starred in every OutRun: a Testarossa in the original, an F40 in Turbo OutRun, and eight classic and modern supercars in OutRun2. This latest and possibly greatest features an eclectic mix, including Don Johnson's 365 Daytona from Miami Vice, the Dino 246 from Cannonball Run, and the 288GT0, close cousin to Magnum P.I.'s 308. The rarest is the cover car, the F50, of which 349 were produced (leading out the new Enzo Ferrari's 399). To keep that exclusive mystique, Ferrari produced exactly one less than it believed it could sell. **B+**



→ Skid-mark heaven: OutRun 2 would be just another arcade racer without its heart and soul: powerliding. Accelerate and turn to the left just right to execute the most awesome powerlides in regular races or a slew of powerlide challenges.



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RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

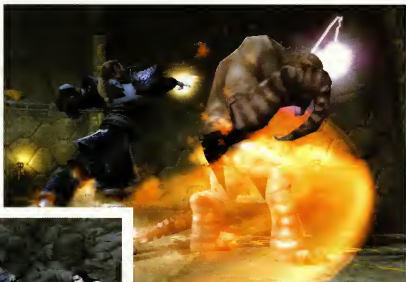
DEMON STONE

MEDIEVAL MASHING

CONVERTER PS2/XB CRASHBURN ATARI DEVELOPER STORMFRONT STUDIOS



→ Hack-n-slash action comes to the *Forgotten Realms* franchise. Players can switch characters on the fly in this should-been *Two Towers* sequel.



➔ The *Forgotten Realms* pen-and-paper RPG series has inspired numerous popular videogames—but these games have often lacked style. Atari has teamed up with the guys behind EA's *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* to change that. Having worked on a movie game, Stormfront Studios knows how to finally bring cinematic flair to this world of classic fantasy.

In fact, what's most striking about the game is its looks, not its gameplay. Like the *LOTR* games—which use the same technology—

Demon Stone packs its levels with hordes of enemies, items to interact with, and a realistic sheen. No boxy rooms here; crumbling walls, broken pillars, and swinging rope bridges spice up the indoor environments, while the outdoor areas range from lush jungles to chaotic battlefields. Players won't get tired of looking at this game. You might even mistake the PS2 version for an Xbox game.

As with *LOTR*, players travel with a party of adventurers through the game's levels. Unlike the *LOTR*

games, however, players can switch between the three characters on the fly: the broad-shouldered warrior Rannek, the powerful mage Illius, and the stealthy, smart-ass rogue Zhai. Each has special abilities that work well in specific situations.

The characters are more than just the classes they represent. They exchange quips and tips on the battlefield and reveal their stories in tightly executed mini-cinemas. R.A. Salvatore, the author of countless *Forgotten Realms* novels, and his most

popular creation, Drizzt Do'Urden, have both been drafted to punch up *Demon Stone* as well. So have actors Patrick Stewart and Michael Clarke Duncan, who provide voices for your mentor and the evil Ygorl, respectively. If Stormfront can tighten up the controls, a problem left over from *LOTR*, then this game will make fantasy fans very happy. **B+**

GMA SAYS → The core fighting is a bit wonky, but all the other pieces are in place.

→ HOW HOT...



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PlayStation 2



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RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

SWORN TO PROTECT URANUS



RELEASE NOVEMBER

DEVELOPER PS2 CRYTEK/SONY SCEA CRYTEK/SONY INSOMNIAC



→ *Up Your Arsenal* brings Sony's popular franchise ratcheting and clanking into the 21st century with the inclusion of multiplayer modes. Developer Insomniac is planning six levels of online play, including two-player driver/gunner vehicles (like that, huh!). Up to eight players and the USB headset are supported.



Insomniac's *Ratchet & Clank* joined PS2's Greatest Hits

lineup less than nine months after its release, and the sequel *Going Commando* has sold over 4 million copies in less than 18 months. The third title, *Up Your Arsenal*, is due this November, and Sony again looks to build on the momentum generated by the first two games.

The title begins with Clank having landed his own TV show, called *Serget Agent Clank*. But fame doesn't last long for the robot, as he and Ratchet

are soon called upon by the galactic president to save the universe. Ratchet and Clank round up Q-Force, a team composed of past characters from the series, and return to the planet Veldin from the first game to stop the evil Dr. Nefarious.

Up Your Arsenal features 15 weapons, each of which can be upgraded four times, new vehicles including a turboboulder and hovership, and three playable characters: Ratchet, Clank, and Captain Qwark. Qwark, who's returning from earlier in

the series, will come into play at specific points in the game, bringing with him special abilities Ratchet and Clank lack. It looks like they'll need it: Enemy artificial intelligence has also been tweaked from the last title.

By far, *Up Your Arsenal*'s biggest innovation is multiplayer. Up to four players can engage in offline splitscreen action, while a broadband connection supports eight; the USB headset is also supported. The game will feature six levels for online chaos, including destructible environments

and two-player driver/gunner vehicles. Multiplayer will include sizable "nodes": respawn points that prevent players from having to return to a level's beginning. And instead of merely settling for deathmatch-type competitive modes, Insomniac is including levels in which players must work as a team to bring about the fall of their opponents' base. **B+**

GMA SAYS → The addition of a multiplayer mode is just the kick in the arsenal *ADC* needs

→ HOW HOT ...



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

POKÉMON LEAFGREEN & FIRERED

SQUIRTLE! SQUIRTLE!

SYSTEM: GBA PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK

When Nintendo left certain classic Pokémon out of *Ruby* and *Sapphire* with no obvious way to obtain them, you knew another game was coming...and sure enough, along come *FireRed* and *LeafGreen* to fill the gap.

As the names suggest, the new games are in fact remakes of the original Pokémon titles released way back in 1998 (and yes, we realize the more patriotic *Red* and *Blue* were the names of the original U.S. releases, but Nintendo is sticking to Japan's *Red* and *Green* monikers this time around). Aside from gaining the then-inconsiderable Game Boy Advance graphical sheen, *FireRed* and *LeafGreen* bring 2-on-2 battles and other *Ruby* and *Sapphire* enhancements to the original world of Kanto.

The main adventure generally follows the path of the original protagonist, from starting out at Professor Oak's lab in Pallet to defeating Gary (sorry, Rival!) in Victory Road, but there are also

a host of new islands to unlock and explore. Alongside Johto Pokémon, breeding centers, and all sorts of other amenities that couldn't be shoehorned into the original world, basic wireless minigames can be unlocked on the islands to keep you occupied for 30 seconds or so. The wireless functionality of the bundled adapters is better served for battling and chatting—up to 40 Poké-freaks can meet in a "union room" before splitting up to fight in groups of four or chat in groups of five, all without cumbersome wires. Not that it particularly matters: Pokémon fans are more excited about seeing Bulbasaur, Charmeleon, and Squirtle again. And how can you argue against the return of Team Rocket? ☸

GMA SAYS → The new tutorial mode aside, there's nothing here to convert Pokémon virgins—but fans will eat this up.

→ HOW HOT...



Check and organize POKÉMON that are traveling with you in your party.



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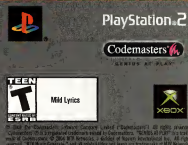
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RELEASE | WINTER 2005

DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

DUST OFF THE RAY GUNS AND PLAY SOME GRAND THEFT UFO

CRYSTAL PS2/XB CHALLENGER THQ DEVELOPER PANDEMIC



➔ It seems like it'd be hard to come up with a concept more antisocial than *Grand Theft Auto*, but THQ's *Destroy All Humans* does it with aplomb. Tommy Vercetti wanted only to take over a major city, and he didn't suck anyone's brain out in the process. As Cryptosporidium-137—Crypto for short, the "hero" of developer Pandemic's latest project—brain sucking could be the least of what you'll be up to.

Crypto is an alien from outer space, a short, bug-eyed, gray fellow

in the classic tradition of B-grade invasion paranoia flicks, and the title of the game makes his mission about as clear as possible. It seems that his people, after cloning themselves for centuries of virtual immortality, needs to harvest some fresh genes from a more youthful, energetic species. "Homo sapiens" fits their bill of fare just right.

Destroy All Humans uses this premise to mix a unique grab bag of gameplay concepts. It takes some ideas from another Pandemic project,

Mercenaries (LucasArts), and it looks to run on the same engine (offering expansive, detailed, destructible environments and realistic Havok physics), but it's a very different animal in many ways.

Mercenaries is mostly about blowing stuff up. *Destroy All Humans*, too, and Crypto blows stuff up real good, but between bouts of wrecking the landscape and demolishing waves of puny Earth military technology, he unleashes some remarkably subtle skills as well. There are wads of

psychic power inside his big, fat, gray head—this lets him force human peons to do his bidding, take on human form for a sneakier approach, or toss stuff around with some telekinetic muscle.

Though it doesn't feature the same massive garage of vehicles as games like *GTA* or *Mercenaries*, *Destroy All Humans* splits its time between Crypto's adventures on foot and larger-scale action in his one-man flying saucer. He's more nimble outside the UFO, with more weapons and access

INCOMING GAMES

destroy of humans



→ In *Destroy All Humans*, Crypto is hell-bent on wiping out humanity. What then? As these screens show, future *DAH* expansion packs might include *Destroy All Cars*, *Destroy All Buildings*, and *Destroy All Cows*.



WE'RE NOT A CLONE

In the classic sci-fi movies that inspired *DAH* (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *War of the Worlds*, *This Island Earth*), the bad guys never needed a reason to take over the world. It was there, so why not?

Pandemic gives way to modern fashion with a cleverer setup for its alien invasion, though. The furions seek genetic material so they can quit cloning themselves for 137 generations running. Apparently, a furion can be cloned for only so long

before he starts going postal, which is why the game's main character (he's on his 137th generation!) has a tendency to get out of hand. ☹

to his psychic powers, but for sheer speed and destructive capacity, the saucer takes the prize, and it can abduct any creature on the map with ease. The design is an interesting choice on Pandemic's part—while it's obviously inspired by your classic *Mars Attacks!* spacecraft, the details give it a harder, more modern edge, helping mitigate the camp factor a bit.

Which is not to say the camp factor isn't pretty high anyway. It has to be in a game in which the ultimate goal is ostensibly the death of the

entire human race. The script and background are loaded with sci-fi references, and Pandemic's not above some plain old goofiness, giving Crypto's weapons names such as zap-o-matic, quantum disintegrator, and brain exploder. That last one sure sounds fun.

What could put *Destroy All Humans* over the top is the nonlinear level design that Pandemic has been toutling. The plan is to let players pick their own invasion strategy, whether it's to overwhelm with firepower,

subvert with psychic domination, or just sneak around mutilating cattle and spooking lone hillbillies.

Not all the humans are so easily destroyed, though—in the classic *X-Files* tradition, the Majestic-12 conspiracy is waiting to offer Crypto some stiff opposition. But without at least a little challenge, wiping out humanity wouldn't be much fun. ☹

GMA SAYS → Pandemic brings out the humanizing alien in us all, and it feels right.

→ HOW HOT...



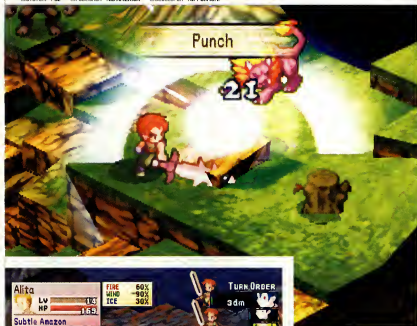
RELEASE | AUGUST

PHANTOM BRAVE

TOO CUTE TO BE SCARY



DEV: NIPPON ICHI PS2 PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA DEVELOPER: NIPPON ICHI



→ Home of the brave: Developer Nippon Ichi combines its signature deep strategy and cutesy anime to deliver *Phantom Brave*, a game that could surpass the company's surprise hit, *Disgaea*.

➔ The recent release of *La Pucelle: Tactics* has kept the current reigning kings of strategy, Nippon Ichi, in the forefront of fans' minds. But by now, most gamers are probably aware that *La Pucelle* came out in Japan well before last year's surprise hit *Disgaea* did.

Phantom Brave is the developer's most recent effort (about six months old) and packs its trademark one-two punch of deep strategy and adorable anime style. It's an evolution for the genre, appearing to have all the depth

of *Disgaea* while offering something even more playable for fans and newbies alike.

The game depicts the life of the young Marona. Having lost her parents in a supernatural battle, she lives with the ghost of one of her father's battle comrades. The enigmatic Ash was saved from death by Marona's father's last words, but he's trapped between this world and the next.

Fortunately, Marona can summon and control spirits. It makes people afraid of her, despite her bubbly

disposition, but it also means they'll pay her to take care of their dirty work. She gives the spirits physical forms by confining them in objects, and this forms the core of the game's battle system.

Nippon Ichi has dispensed with the familiar grids favored by most strategy games. While titles like *Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits* and *Future Tactics* have already done this, it seems *Phantom Brave* will be the first to get it right.

Once Marona incarnates her

buddies in rocks, plants, and weaponry (what they're interred in affects their stats), players fight it out with the signature flair of the other Nippon Ichi games. Massive special attacks, intertwined strategies between characters and objects, and other twists will excite fans of *Disgaea* and interest others tired of more traditional battle systems. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Nippon Ichi is on a roll—except this game is by its best yet.

➔ **HOW HOT...**



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

KING OF FIGHTERS: MAXIMUM IMPACT

HOT, FRESH, AND PLAYABLE. WAIT, IS THIS REALLY KOF?

CREATED BY PS2 PUBLISHER SNK NEOGEO USA DEVELOPER SNK PLAYMORE

For a series that's lasted for 10 years and as many games, *King of Fighters* has never made much of a splash here in the U.S. By the time it caught steam in Asia, arcade gaming and 2D fighters were both on their way out here. Clearly, SNK is in need of a fresh approach if it wants *KOF* to survive in the States.

Which is apparently what it's doing: *KOF: Maximum Impact* is built from the ground up for the PS2, and perhaps more surprisingly, it is a game that may finally bring the *KOF* series some attention. It's a well-realized mix of 2D and 3D fighting, one that preserves the history of *KOF* while bridging the gap between the past and the present.

KOF has always been daunting for gamers who didn't follow the series slavishly; the most intelligent decisions the developers made for *Maximum Impact* may not be what was kept, but what was cut. It's 1-on-1, and the cast list is

manageable. Longtime fans may cry foul, but they can head to the arcade.

The *KOF* characters, who have always been some of the coolest kids on the fighting-game block, are truly brought to life in 3D. Dispensing with their decade-old 2D counterparts allows the series' style to come to the forefront instead of being obscured by outdated technology.

The gameplay also melds the old with the new. While it maintains a 2D feel and plenty of supernatural special moves, *Maximum Impact*'s classic feel is tempered with a solid combo system and new characters that are clearly influenced by more contemporary trends. [Read: *Tekken*.]

Finally, SNK Playmore is developing a *KOF* for the rest of us. ☺

GMA SAYS → This one breaks the mold. Think of it: a *KOF* anybody might buy

→ HOW HOT...



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RELEASE | AUGUST

PIKMIN 2

BATTERIES INCLUDED

DISTRIBUTOR GC □ PUBLISHER NINTENDO □ DEVELOPER NINTENDO



➔ Many have speculated as to what kind of drugs Shigeru Miyamoto was using to inspire the strange and surreal *Pikmin*. But to focus on the bizarre concept of tiny, servile, flower-topped beings is to ignore how ingenious it was to incorporate army-based tactics into a game without the dull and depressing trappings of a war game.

Like its predecessor, *Pikmin* 2 is impossibly cute—even the most deadly enemy capable of obliterating an army of 100 pikmin in 10 seconds

looks positively cuddleworthy. Behind the *Toy Story*-esque graphics, though, is a deep and engrossing game of planning and strategy.

Captain Olimar returns to the planet of Pikmin on a mission: He's got to find and salvage treasure on that planet to work off his company's debt. This time, he's brought his assistant, Louie, with him to help—and through their exploration on both the surface and underground caverns of the planet, they discover valuable artifacts, such as a discarded playing

card [dubbed here a "luck water"]. You can easily switch between Captain Olimar and Louie and use either one to command swarms of pikmin to do your bidding. Pikmin, for the uninitiated, are strange creatures that can be harvested from indigenous flowers. They carry out orders—such as attacking enemies or carrying treasure—obediently and diligently, but they definitely need supervision to ensure they don't wander right into the jaws of an awaiting insect or drown in a puddle. In short, it's up to

you to plan the tasks for the pikmin and keep them protected from perils.

Captain Olimar, Louie, and the pikmin are very small relative to the flora and fauna of the planet, as well as to the treasure they're collecting. It takes a swarm of pikmin to destroy one enemy insect, and several to carry a bottle cap. There usually is some puzzle involved in acquiring treasure, so you've got to figure out how to get through barriers and use the pikmin accordingly. For example, the red pikmin are resistant to fire, but will

PICK YOUR PIKMIN

→ If you plan and use pikmin carefully, you can overcome the obstacles of the Pikmin planet. Pikmin with flowers on their heads are mature and faster than the neophytes with green leaves. Here's the breakdown:

Blue	Invulnerable to water
Yellow	Invulnerable to electricity
Red	Invulnerable to fire
Purple	Ultrapowerful
White	Poison-resistant



→ A love for gardening, not drugs, inspired designer Shigeru Miyamoto to create the ingenious Pikmin. His sequel looks to be equally engaging, with new pikmin to carry out your bidding.



drown immediately in water; the new purple pikmin are 10 times heavier and stronger than regular pikmin, so you don't need as many to tackle enemies or flatten a paper bag in your path. White pikmin, the second new type, are small and light, as well as resistant to poison. As you get deeper into the game, there are further intricacies—for example, you can collect berries to acquire a potion that you can spray on pikmin to make them feistier.

There are enough gameplay complexities to keep things challenging,

and the time limit of the first *Pikmin* game has been tossed, allowing you to take as long as you need to experiment and explore. You can also unlock a challenge mode in which you have a set number of pikmin to defeat enemies in various arenas, plus you can earn pink flowers if you don't lose any pikmin in battle. You can play alone or cooperatively with a friend.

If you're more inclined to want to whip your friend's butt, though, there's also a new two-player battle mode. One player controls Olimar,

the other Louie, and each commands a pikmin army charged with either obtaining four yellow marbles or nabbing a marble from the other team. Each of 10 battle arenas is filled with its own obstacles and enemies. They're also filled with cherries, and every cherry you collect earns you a spin of a roulette wheel. Every spin brings forth a chaotic event, such as sending enemies on your opponent, increasing the number of pikmin, recovering stolen marbles, or even burying enemy

pikmin. The two-player mode brings a new competitive element to *Pikmin*, as well as complete unpredictability. Games are fast-paced and frenzied, just as they should be, adding welcome replayability.

Improved and regrooved, *Pikmin 2* could prove to be the perfect fix for strategy gamers who can't face yet another camo-clad war game. **B+**

GAME SAYS → Nintendo has still got it, quality gameplay surrounded by a surreal candy coating

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥

MEGA MAN X COMMAND MISSION

ANNOYED ANDROID

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM



→ A new role: Capcom expands the storied Mega Man universe with Mega Man X Command Mission, an RPG currently under development by the Breath of Fire V team.



As weird as it sounds, turning *Mega Man X* into an RPG is very natural. Given the series' increasingly convoluted stories and cinematic bent, it takes mere moments for the rightness of *Command Mission* to sink in. With the folks behind the cult-favorite PlayStation 2 RPG *Breath of Fire V: Dragon Quarter* in charge, it's also clear that this game has a pedigree beyond its action roots.

The bright, technological world of the *MMX* series makes for the perfect RPG universe. The futuristic cyber

cities that have always tantalizingly shown up in the openings of the *Mega Man* games are finally laid out before you. Dozens of detailed locales with a techno-sheen have been crafted for X, Zero, and Axl—as well as new characters—to clamber through.

In addition to the usual slate of animalistic Mavericks to hunt, a group of rebellious Reploids has appeared. Just how these factions interact isn't yet clear, but expect a tale of outlandish drama, assuming you can keep a straight face. Fans of action

anime will probably fare best here.

Gameplaywise, *Command Mission* breaks down into exploration and turn-based RPG fighting, just as you'd expect. Each android packs "action trigger" special attacks, which require anything from fighting-game-style move combos (in Zero's case) to simply holding down a button to charge up your shot (that's X's attack). It's a good idea to keep a little action for the fans, right?

It's clear that devotees of the *Mega Man X* universe will be in Reploid

rapture when this game hits, provided they like traditional console RPGs.

The rest of us might take a little convincing. What we've played so far shows us nothing truly new, and the wacky world of *Mega Man X* is as confusing as it is alluring. Still, it has transitioned well to this new format, and the final version promises to be worth a look for both camps. **B+**

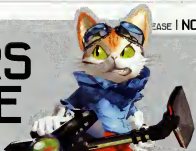
GMA SAYS → Robots and RPGs go so well together, we expect Capcom to make the next for years to come.

→ HOW HOT...



BLINX 2: MASTERS OF TIME & SPACE

IT'S ACTUALLY NOT ALL ABOUT ME-OW



Designer XB Publisher MICROSOFT Developer ARTOON



You probably didn't play the first *Blinx*. If you did, you probably didn't like it. If you did, you probably didn't tell anyone...unless your name is Tom Byron, anyway (Retro/Active, July 2004). But never mind all that. This time, the series' developer, Artoon, aims to create a game that "*Blinx* fans can be proud to like," according to developer Naoto Ohshima.

Instead of putting *Blinx* to sleep after the original's so-so reception,

Microsoft has given Artoon the time to truly bring the series to life. This time around, it seems the developers worked in two phases. Phase one: Fix everything that was wrong with *Blinx*. Phase two: Add a whole bunch of new stuff.

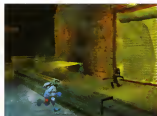
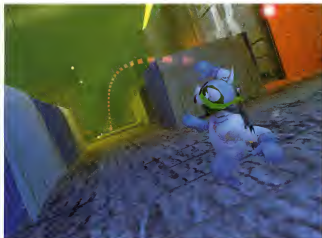
For starters, the levels have been drastically increased in size. Each one still contains those crazy time puzzles, but also more in the way of traditional run-n-jump action-game elements: boxes to smash, enemies to fight, platforms to jump on.

Fortunately, your character is much more agile. In an interesting twist, the main character also isn't Blinx himself this time—you design your own cat from the ground up, controlling a huge number of options (see sidebar).

But these are hardly the most impressive additions. Artoon has added a whole new clan of creatures to the game: the Tom Tom Gang, a group of swarthy pigs who are determined to beat the cats at their own game. While it's all a little

bit hokey, Artoon is living up to its name by infusing the characters with animated personalities. But beyond that, these crazy pigs also bring a whole new type of gameplay to the table. As the subtitle *Masters of Time & Space* hints, the pigs manipulate physical reality the same way the cats screw around with time.

As a member of the Tom Tom Gang, you sneak around cat-controlled compounds using devices such as decoys, ground-tunneling



→ Time heals all wounds: Learning from the feelings of the original, Artoon has infused *Blinx 2* with drastically larger levels, far more action, new characters, and cooperative and competitive multiplayer modes. The game's use of time as a game mechanic hasn't changed.



DRESS YOU UP IN MY LOVE

➔ One of the coolest things about *Blinx 2* is also probably one of the least useful: You can create your feline (or porcine) avatar from the ground up, controlling everything from the color of his fur to the size of his ears. The amount of control is almost shocking, really. There are 26 different facets of the size, shape, and color of the character to modify, and each has 100 different degrees, plus patterning and other options. You even create your team's flag. *Blinx 2* offers more customization than most MMOs, leading us to believe that at one time this game was planned for Xbox Live but had its plug pulled. Drat, cat. ☹

portals, teleporters, and even black holes to take out the guards. The struggles of the pigs and cats are even woven together in one constantly alternating story, giving you one big tale with two types of significantly different gameplay.

The other huge addition to *Blinx 2* is multiplayer, both cooperative and competitive. In the co-op game, you travel through the game's levels spitscreen with a friend, solving the puzzles together; in fact, one player can specialize in puzzle solving and

the other in combat if you like. Areas that you can see but not reach in the single-player game will open up for two players, allowing you to enjoy secrets you can't get any other way and giving you a reason to play as a pair.

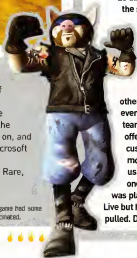
Meanwhile, the versus game pits cats against pigs in a free-for-all battle, with their time and space powers at the ready. Confoundingly, Microsoft and Artoon have decided to not include Xbox Live support in the game for these modes, which is

about the only obvious complaint at this stage of development.

Blinx 2 is showing the promise many thought the original failed to deliver on, and it may finally provide Microsoft with a truly memorable platformer. Why'd it buy Rare, again? ☹

GMA SAYS → The first game had some heralds, but this cat's been vaccinated.

→ HOW HOT... ☹☹☹☹☹



RELEASE | AUGUST

HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!

SO CUTE. AND YET SO FUN!

PLATFORM: PS2 DEVELOPER: SONY DEVELOPER: CLIP HANE



→ Par for the course: The latest and possibly greatest in the Hot Shots Golf franchise features more courses, more characters, better ball physics, minigolf, and, yep, online play.



People who don't like golf usually don't play golf videogames. But the upcoming *Hot Shots Golf Fore!* is one of those titles that can get anyone into the game. It works the way any simplified and wacky sports game does: by making the controls easy and the fun accessible.

Most of the features that made the series popular return here. You still have the fun cartoon look, the overall lighthearted tone, and most important, the simple controls.

Three button taps determine the force of the swing and accuracy with which you connect. If timing that third tap is too frustrating, playing in the newly added Easy mode requires just two taps to drive the ball and calculates the accuracy for you. When you're right near the hole, a grid with sliding markers shows up and helps you see the slope of the green. And depending on how well you execute your shots, the caddy who tags along makes a funny compliment or insult.

There are 13 colorful courses this time and 34 characters (including one that looks like an animated version of Samuel L. Jackson in *Shall!*). Not only can you play with up to four players using a Multitap, but the experience goes to the next level with online gameplay. Now you have the option to engage in tournaments with other *Hot Shots Golf* fans around the country. Also, minigolf is back, a short snack of a competition in which the object is to get the ball to travel as long a distance as possible before going in

the hole. There are still tricky things like water hazards to avoid, so you end up trying crazy bank shots that go around obstacles, making it almost resemble a pool game.

Yes, the *Mario Golf* series has some solid competition. *Hot Shots Golf Fore!* definitely looks promising so far, and it looks like Sony is going to score another hole in one. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Rumor has it, a PSP version is in the works. We're stoked, or, stoked.

→ HOW HOT...



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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

CAPCOM FIGHTING
EVOLUTION

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST



→ *Capcom Fighting Evolution* is a veritable Who's Who of Capcom fighting games. The all-star cast includes the obvious (Chun Li, Ryu to the not-so [Warlord's] Hauser). For extra punch, Capcom is planning Xbox Live support.



Once upon a time, Capcom had a good idea: cram a host of characters from 15 years of fighting games into a single all-star cast. Then it had a bad idea: make it another 3D fighter, something that has never been Capcom's strong suit. *Capcom Fighting All-Stars* was shown to the public once and quietly canceled a few months later.

That all-star cast is still a good idea. An original 2D fighter is also a good idea. *Capcom Fighting Evolution*—originally announced as *Capcom Fighting Jam*—combines those ideas to

create a game that likely won't suffer the same fate as *All-Stars*.

Looking at the partially revealed cast, it's obvious someone at Capcom has a sense of humor. There are plenty of *Street Fighter* mainstays—SFZ's Chun Li, the original SFZ's Ryu—but they're facing some of Capcom's weirdest creations, including Felicia from *Darkstalkers* and *Warlord's* monstrous boss character Hauser. There's also the blond cutie Ingrid, one of three original characters rescued from the *All-Stars* scrap heap.

At first glance, *CFE* looks like Capcom vs. SNK, but its game system is substantially different. There's no ratio system nor any tag features. Every fight is a 2-on-2 team battle (like *King of Fighters* in two-thirds scale), with a little bit of a chess match behind choosing which character to field in each round.

The six-button controls should prove familiar, though, as should the three (at least) supermove systems. *CFE* wasn't playable at E3, but the first screens reveal a one-stage

power meter, a two-stage variant, and a stock system resembling the advanced mode in *King of Fighters '97*.

Aspiring champions should prepare for online domination—*CFE* will feature head-to-head online battles on Xbox Live. If Capcom can lick the technical difficulties that were in *Capcom vs. SNK 2*, 2004 could be a fighting fan's best year yet. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Felicia from *Darkstalkers*? Xbox Live support? We like the way this *Street Fighter* is evolving.

→ **HOW HOT...**



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CAPCOM



PlayStation 2

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RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

GRADIUS V

LACKING ONLY A CUTE VOICE SAYING "OPTION"

DIRECTOR: PS2 DEVELOPER: KONAMI DEVELOPER: TREASURE/KONAMI TWO



→ 2D or not 2D: For Gradius V that was never the question. For 2D-shooter fans, the real question has been how to inject some freshness into their favorite genre. Konami may have found the answer in careful weapon and level design, stunning visuals (perhaps the best ever), and a two-player co-op mode.



➔ These days, 2D shooter fans likely believe that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. *Gradius V* may change their minds. It's been a while coming, but it looks like the extra months of development have been spent on a first-rate reinvention of the *Gradius* concept.

Lately, Treasure has cranked out a few games that have felt unfinished—*Stretch Panic* was a playable-engine demo, *Ikaruga* an interactive design experiment. *Gradius V*, by comparison, shows thought and care in its

weapons and level design, not to mention some of the prettiest shooter visuals in history.

Initially, the selection of weapons seems too small—four basic configurations, no laser variants, and only one shield type. What fills the void and more is the new selection of options (called "Multiples" here).

The Multiple satellite weapons trail around the Vic Viper in four formations, one for each weapon loadout, offering a unique mix of firepower and versatility with the R1

Multiple control button. The Rotate option provides great defense but little control; Direction trades maneuverability for pinpoint targeting; Spacing offers widespread or concentrated fire; while Freeze gives total control to expert players.

Smart weapons are pointless without well-designed levels, and *G5* delivers. The interior sections in the second stage, especially when they switch to vertical scrolling, offer tough tests in careful Multiple control. A second Viper tagging along helps—

this is the first mainstream *Gradius* with two-player co-op.

The new challenges are balanced by a kind difficulty tweak, though. Multiples don't die with the Viper—instead, they briefly hang around for quick retrieval by a revived ship. Hardcore fans can play old-school style, but it's a fix shooter novices can definitely appreciate. **B+**

GMA SAYS → We dig old-school shooters, as long as they aren't impossible to play.

→ HOW HOT...



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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

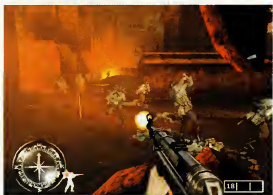
CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR

THERE'S NOTHING QUIET ON THE WESTERN, EASTERN, OR SOUTHERN FRONTS

DEVELOPER: BCI/SP2009 PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION CREDITS: SPARK



→ Call of Duty: Finest Hour may break the PC-to-console curse—it might actually be good.



The formula is becoming rote. Megapublisher X releases a high-budget first-person shooter. Said high-budget FPS enjoys critical acclaim and huge commercial success. Megapublisher X subsequently ports high-budget first-person shooter to every imaginable platform. Megapublisher X gets much richer.

Activision's Call of Duty franchise is the latest beneficiary of this business model, and, as if to explicitly scoff in the face of our indignant cynicism, all signs point to it turning out really, really well.

Call of Duty: Finest Hour is a console follow-up to last year's epic, gritty, and atmospheric PC FPS, and luckily, it's much more than a straight-up port job. Think of it as a revision of its predecessor, complete with new scenarios, new characters, and a different take on World War II. More important, the engine is being constructed from the ground up, which should help ensure that it doesn't resemble those janky, shoehorned PC-to-console ports we're all sadly familiar with.

All the action will take place on the war's three major fronts, putting players in the iron-shod boots of Russian, American, and British soldiers. Developer Spark is flipping things up, too, letting players take on roles not normally touched by WWII-era shooters—like that of an African-American tank driver from the legendary 761st Black Panther Battalion. Vehicles are also being cranked up a notch; players should expect to spend much more time driving jeeps, manning heavy

artillery, and piloting tanks. Being that the underdeveloped vehicle element was one of the more heavily griped-on aspects of the original, this is good news.

We have faith that the console-ization of Call of Duty will meet our lofty expectations. ☛

GMA SAYS → If Activision suffers this fledgling franchise with a half-assed console effort, we'll consider it an act of war.

→ HOW HOT...



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INCOMING GAMES
galleon

RELEASE | OCTOBER

GALLEON

PIRATES OF THE CONSOLE-BEAN

DEVISOR: XB PUBLISHER: ATLUS DEVELOPER: CONFOUNDING FACTOR



→Originally developed for the Dreamcast, *Galleon* still looks like it could shiver more than a few timbers when it hits Xbox this fall. The pirate theme may not be everyone's cup of grog, but the action and depth should be.



➔ **Avast ye, landlubbers!** It's time to set sail for high adventure with Atlus Games' upcoming pirate action-platformer *Galleon*. The brainchild of *Tomb Raider* creator Toby Gard, *Galleon* has gone through a bit of an adventure of its own, having spent more than five years in development. It's finally managed to crawl from the murky waters to which the doomed Dreamcast version was scuttled long ago to now appear on Xbox.

The star of *Galleon* is an athletic, lanky pirate captain named Rhama

Sabrier. Much like his distant cousin Lara Croft, Rhama can execute a wide range of stylish maneuvers: climbing various surfaces, hanging on ledges, Olympic-class swimming, and *Prince of Persia*-style wall running, to name a few. Two different movement speeds, made possible by Xbox's precise analog controls, allow for high-speed acrobatics as well as cautious navigation through precarious environments.

Galleon features a streamlined combat system with plenty of flashy

moves and special techniques. Rhama has an arsenal of kicks, head butts, throws, charges, and magical attacks at his disposal, which form a robust and fast-paced combo system. More techniques can be unlocked with combo points, which are earned by defeating chains of enemies in quick succession.

The adventure takes place across a series of six large and vibrant islands, as Rhama races against time to recover a mysterious herb that grants its bearer mighty powers. Our

hero will encounter a plethora of quirky, cartoonish characters during his travels, including a redheaded mystic named Faith and a crafty martial artist named Mihoko; both of these young ladies assist Rhama with various puzzles and also seem to be the subject of his romantic interests. Saucy wenches! ☞

GMA SAYS → A mysterious herb that grants its bearer mighty powers? We'll definitely play this one—for medical reasons only, of course.

→ **HOW HOT...**



GALLERY

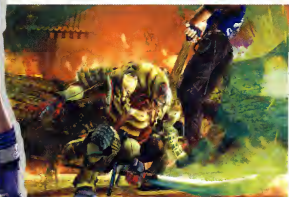
TEKKEN 5

FIVE ALIVE AND KICKING

While Tekken might not be the superior fighting game, it certainly is the more popular one, at least in North America, when compared to Sega's *Virtua Fighter* series. Everything you love about Tekken is back and better than ever. Expect brutal, hard-hitting characters, an improved sense of speed and carnage, and a wicked new graphics engine that makes Yoshimitsu, Gunjack, Paul Phoenix, and the rest of the Tekken crew look better than ever before. This one should be in arcades shortly and on PlayStation 2 in early 2005.



→ As you can see by these screenshots, the graphics have improved to the point that it would make *Soul Calibur 2* blush. The backgrounds are interactive, too. The scenery shatters and crumbles depending on where and how you slam your opponent around.



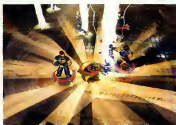
RELEASE | FALL

X-MEN: LEGENDS

BECAUSE THE +3 ICE BEAM IS COOL



CONSOLE: GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION DEVELOPER: RAVEN



→ With a story written by former X-Men scribes and a cast of classic characters, there's plenty to be x-cited (that'll about in X-Men: Legends, Activision's action RPG. Sorry, these "x-citement" and "x-collant" jokes just seem to write themselves. They must be x-cruciating to read!

Games based on comic books have always been a good idea. What could be better suited for a high-energy action game than pitting do-gooders with awesome superpowers against ne'er-do-wells with equally awesome superpowers? Alas, the execution isn't there often enough (*Fantastic Four*, *Spawn*, *N64's Superman*).

Activision, experienced in the burgeoning field of superheroics, is trying a different approach with *X-Men: Legends*—instead of starring in a pure

single-player action game, Marvel Comics' greatest superhero team finds itself in a 20-hour-long action-RPG. Obviously inspired by games such as *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, *Legends* puts you in control of a squad of four X-Men, but the catch is that players have direct control over only one X-man at a time. Players can switch to any of the characters at any time, with the A.I. managing the rest of the team.

Right about now, that burning sensation in your brain begs to ask the question, what about four-player

support? The original plan called for only two-player cooperative play where one companion could join or leave the game at any time. But GMR has learned that Raven is in fact incorporating four-player simultaneous co-op play in addition to the pre-existing four-player battle royale mode. With four controller ports and other companies like Konami learning from past mistakes (i.e. *TMNT*), this is a definite good move.

The player also has a vital role in team management, and this is where

the RPG aspect kicks in. Each character's set of special moves can be leveled up. For example, Cyclops' optic-beam attacks can be made more powerful, more accurate, or more energy efficient, and he also has other noncombat attributes that can be developed, such as leadership, which adds damage and experience bonuses for the whole group in battle. **B+**

GMR SAYS → The X-Men, four player co-op, no little Barry-yeah, we'll give it a shot.

→ HOW HOT...

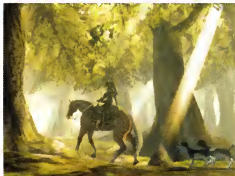


GALLERY

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

THIS IS THE ONE YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker is a great game and all that, but it's not what gamers wanted nor expected out of Nintendo's first GameCube *Zelda* effort. What gamers got was a cel-shaded action dwarf seemingly designed for mewling kittens. But what gamers wanted was the gritty, badass grown-up Link seen battling Ganondorf in the early trailer released shortly before GameCube's debut. Nintendo looks set to make up for its early gaffe in this rousing new epic that echoes Link's appearance in *Soul Calibur II*.



→ Hyrulean high adventure meets high-speed *Hidriga* on horseback. Link is seen here (left, and below) on what might just be a grown-up Epona battling squadrons of warbling-mounted tough guys. We're sad to say the new *Legend of Zelda* game won't arrive until sometime in 2005.



COVER

A LIFE OF CRIME

and the world's most

gra the san



nd Ft auto andreas

Written by: James Mielke,
Illustrations by: Rey Serrano

PS2 PS3 PS4 ROCKSTAR ROCKSTAR NORTH OCTOBER 2004

KILLING TIME WITH THE WORLD'S GREATEST GAME

➔ It's poetic that nearly two years to the day since *GTA: Vice City* first brought gaming to unparalleled heights that the series returns to put every would-be crime-sim kingpin in its place. The lines have been drawn and the gloves are off for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, the final shot in the trilogy that *GTA3* started three short years ago. This is its story....





→ The urban swelter of the inner-city gives way to the dry climes of the open road and small highway towns. Will CJ and the Orange Grove Families crew meet with *Deliverance*-style homophobia and misogyny? We hope not, but it seems a distinct possibility given Rockstar's occasional penchant for twisted mission objectives.



license to ill

Whoever said "crime doesn't pay" clearly doesn't do the books at Rockstar HQ, the boutique division of parent company Take-Two Interactive, based in the trendy SoHo district of New York City. The series that started out as a burning ember of a game back in 1998—notorious for its dodgy 2D graphics and potty-mouth script—has turned into a full-on rampaging brush fire since its move into 3D with *Grand Theft Auto III* and *GTA: Vice City*, selling more than 30 million copies in the process. As games, they're a little bit of everything for everyone, with a whole lot of gameplay thrown in. *GTA* first emerged in the late '90s as the industry was drowning in a sea of cute 'n' cuddly 3D platformers, arcade-centric racing and fighting games, and by-the-numbers RPGs. As developers struggled to find their footing while creating 3D worlds on limited hardware, the development team formerly known as DMA (Doesn't Mean Anything!) Design eschewed the trappings of modern trends, creating a mostly flat neo-2D world where the main character was little more than a few pixels high. In an era when game design subscribed to aging, antiquated notions of heroism (young orphan saves the world "yawn!") or simple recycled mascot-based platform cash-ins (Crash Bandicoot, raise your miserable paw!), *Grand Theft Auto*'s use of the small-time two-bit criminal as a playable antihero was like nothing gamers had seen before. Similar to how Quentin Tarantino carved a career out of microscoping the little guy, so too did *Grand Theft Auto* pave the road less traveled, bringing a whole new mindset and perspective to an entertainment medium that, even now, can still be considered fledgling.

it takes a nation of millions

Now, hot on the heels of two of the best-selling titles in the long history of videogames comes the final salvo in a trilogy started by *Grand Theft Auto III*. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, scheduled for release this October for PlayStation 2, once again puts the spotlight on the little guy—in this case, one Carl Johnson—better known as CJ to his friends and family, a collective known as the Orange Grove Families.

In the early 1990s, shortly after his younger brother Brian was killed, CJ moved from Los Santos to the relatively peaceful climes of San Fierro. But five years later, CJ's mother is murdered, and his friends back home are locked in a downward spiral, prompting CJ to hop in his car for someone's car!, make his way back to Los Santos, and straighten things out. Although the game centers on CJ himself, he has a tight-knit posse that goes where he goes. At his side are older brother Sweet and his two friends, Smoke and Ryder. CJ's sister Kendi also plays a large role in the game's events. The young Johnson's travels will take him to the far corners of San Andreas, an enormous place that eclipses the geography of the past two games combined.

San Andreas, much like Liberty City and Vice City, is a fictional area inspired by real-world settings. San Andreas is analogous to California (with a dash of Nevada thrown in for good measure), with Los Santos being the equivalent of Los Angeles. Likewise, San Fierro is San Francisco, and Las Venturas is tantamount to the gambling capital of the world, Las Vegas (although it's contained within San Andreas).

boundaries). Each one of these cities is at least as big as Vice City, and that's not counting the vast expanses of land in between. But more on that later.

As *GTA3* and *Vice City* did before it, *San Andreas* takes its cues from touchstones of urban-crime culture. Movies like *Casino* and *Boyz n the Hood* color the settings and events contained herein, while early '90s hip-hop culture paints both the visual and aural landscape with scenes of hazy, sunset-drenched barrios and sweltering bass-heavy beats.

Hydraulics, hoochies, hoods, and hookers. Driv'n-hy's, cocaine, Compton, gambling, gangs, pickups, and pimps. These are some of the things that define *San Andreas*, but is there more to it than what's come before? There sure is.

by any means necessary

The gameplay is as open-ended as it ever was, meaning that while each mission objective may have a clear-cut point A to point B solution, there will be plenty of other ways to complete your objectives. But some missions are bound to inspire less sympathy for the protagonist than others. Take one early objective called Menace. It seems the local pizza shop, the Well-Stacked Pizza Company, has erased the Orange Grove Families' graffiti tags from its walls. Ryder (who is a dead ringer for the late NWA member Easy-E) is particularly heated about the offense and heads over to the pizza shop to show the shop owner the error of his ways. As you can imagine, there exists a multitude of ways for you to punish the unfortunate merchant, and the method you use to satisfy the task is up to you.

Another mission, simply titled Drive-By, reunites CJ with his brother Sweet, along with Ryder and the aforementioned Smoke. A rival clan called The Ballas has been encroaching on OGF territory, and it's up to the boys to lay down the boundaries. Without question, the Orange Grove Families is back, and it is during this mission that one of *San Andreas'* interesting new game mechanics comes to light. Of course, drive-bys are nothing new to *GTA*. In past games, all one needed to do was drive around and fire that nine-millimeter out of the left or right window. Now, in *San Andreas*, your entire crew rolls out with you, shotgun loaded. Use at the ready. When you roll up to the rival crew found lounging on a street corner, it's bone chilling to see your buddies unfold out of every available window and fill the air with lead. As you drive around, each member of your crew animates independently and adjusts to the locations of their targets, bending and twisting as they struggle to maintain their aim. Naturally, you're also able to squeeze off a couple rounds as you put your ride (whatever it may be) through its paces. Eventually, the cops will show up to crash the party, and that's when you go to the old standby: the body shop. A new paint job always throws the fuzz off the case, and in *San Andreas*, it also removes the dirt and rust that accumulates on your car.

But once you're out of the car, *GTA* is a different animal, which brings up a small reason for concern: the on-foot targeting system. Formerly known to deeply frustrate gamers who merely want to shoot their enemies, Rockstar has found a solution to this problem in the most surprising of places—one of its very own games. *Manhunt*. Anyone familiar with Rockstar North's ultraviolent stealth-action game will find himself right at home with *San Andreas'* third-person combat. In one brutal sequence, CJ has to extract his brother from an OGF meeting gone wrong. With SWAT team members

TEAR UP THE COUNTRYSIDE IN SAN ANDREAS. WITH A LARGE VARIETY OF OFF-ROAD VEHICLES



[DRIVE-BY]

THE AGE-OLD ART OF DRIVING BY

There used to be a time when people hopped in their cars for the simple purpose of getting from point A to point B. But these days—at least in the world of *GTA*—you're as likely to see towncars rolling down the street spitting fire and lead as you are heading to the Well-Stacked Pizza Co. for dinner. But now instead of just soloing your drive-bys, you'll enjoy the benefit of cameraderie and conversation courtesy of Smoke, Ryder and Sweet, as they lean out of your vehicle, emptying clips just as fast as they can. Farmlly living. *Grand Theft Auto* style.





→ The Los Santos police department (above, top) gives chase via helicopter as our "heroes" attempt to escape in the Hot-Ready-Fur-Primetime ergonomics of an 18-wheeler. Of course, if you need to blow off some steam, tearing up the countryside on a Quad (above, right) always provides goodness. Of course, for those that prefer a more leisurely pace, driving a tractor is fun too.

[IN THE CUT] BARBERSHOP LIBRETTO

One of *San Andreas'* most endearing features is the ability to customize your character's appearance via haircuts that you can get at your friend Old Reece's barbershop. Is a Kid 'N Play fade what you've always wanted? Get some! Rather go out like Mike Tyson? Braid that brain! Better yet, you can change outfits at different shops you visit throughout the giant state of San Andreas. Customizing your burgeoning kingpin is easier than ever!



popping out of every nook and cranny, it's comforting to see that the controls are finally up to speed with the combat. Cops jump out of ventilation shafts and come barreling out of hallway doors, leading the chase to your getaway car, with Ryder at the wheel. The police are in hot pursuit on foot, by car, and in a helicopter. When a potential target exposes himself to your loaded heat, the game takes on an almost *Time Crisis*-meets-*Splinter Cell* sort of vibe. Better controls lead to superior combat, which equals more fun.

Regulate

Of course, it's not all guts and glory. Despite the heavy themes and ominous mission details, *San Andreas* features a lighter touch that contrasts with the game's darker moments (which are as intense, if not more so, as anything that's come before in the series). Naturally, the game's signature humor remains intact (the developers are Scottish, after all). Little cultural jokes and lots of audio and visual gags keep the atmosphere light precisely when you need it. Another new element is *San Andreas'* attention to customization. One of CJ's acquaintances is a barber known as Old Reece. In Old Reece's barber shop, you can alter CJ's hair however you see fit, choosing from a selection of styles that includes an Afro, a blond Afro, an Afro and beard, a flat-top, and many other choices. The tweaking doesn't end there, though. In *Vice City*, you could switch outfits, but only in a mission that required it. Now, you can customize your character with a wild array of outfits found in different shops all over the state. Rockstar reckons that most players' versions of CJ will look rather different from one another by the end.

Other factors help determine your game experience as well. Whether this was inspired by the detail-intensive work of Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* games remains to be answered, but CJ's diet will determine his physical condition and appearance. If you should stop by the Well-Stacked Pizza Company (apparently, the owner is very understanding) for a quick lunch, your weight and size will fluctuate depending on whether you order a Buster (a small meal), a Double Deluxe (bigger), or a Full Rack (a whole pizza). This is just a small sampling of the foods you'll find in the game, and whether you look Dy-no-mite! or like just another Rerun is up to you.

i get around

With a game five times bigger than *Vice City*, you can expect—by Rockstar's estimate—over 200 hours of gameplay. That's not bad for something that fits on a DVD-ROM, but when is too much just too much? Who knows? Running around an area as big as the state of California could potentially be too much for even the most hardened value-conscious gamer, which is why Rockstar North has added tons of countryside quests and missions for gamers to complete. While there are plenty of vehicle-based missions in the confines of the cities themselves, *San Andreas* also allows gamers to use vehicles such as BMX bikes, monster trucks, Sanchez dirt bikes, quadbikes, the Tanker, and even the low-flying Dodo that everyone knows and loves. The game is, not surprisingly, reminiscent of Rockstar's own *Snuggler's Run* in that if you see it, you can go there. The areas are so huge and open that you could easily find yourself just motoring around the countryside, off-road or on. Naturally, you'll be able to go where you want, when you want, but there will always be an agenda once you're done careening around Angel Pine, Shady Creeks, Flint

A LIFE OF CRIME
grand theft auto, gun, and brains

County, Whetstone, Mount Chiliad (a chilled-out mountainy homage to Homer's *The Iliad*), Fern Ridge, and Red County.

One outdoorsy mission finds CJ driving a decoy truck, and he must keep the motorcycle gang that's chasing him from blowing the doors off of it, since that would reveal him to be a fraud. A damage meter shows how much abuse you take as you try to make it to each checkpoint.

The environments are as varied as those you'd find if you were to drive up and down California in real life. Some patches are arid and dry, reflective of Southern California, while other parts are more lush with plant life, such as what you'd encounter in the north. Other touches, like breakable fences, ensure that the driving portions are as engaging as any other part of the game.

so fresh and so clean

Of course, it's hard to encapsulate the myriad features a game like this contains, but we'll try anyway. *GTA's* thrills are derived largely from the fact that there's just so much stuff to do. The attention to detail has always been incredible, and San Andreas reads like a laundry list of the series' greatest attributes cranked up to 11. For example, every city within San Andreas has a major airport. There, you can liberate planes such as the Dodo and fly between cities, should driving cross-country prove too arduous. If you desire to chase some surf, boats are available for slicing up and down the coast. The unspoken benefit here is that this adds quite a lot of variety to the game, preventing players from being mired in inner-city events for too long. Another new feature is the addition of camera control married to the right analog stick. No more fussing around with awkward perspectives. Other odds and ends include the ability to pick up hitchhikers (kids, we don't recommend doing this in real life) and tow cars by hooking them up to your (hoisted) tow truck.

The graphics benefit from an improved RenderWare toolkit and graphics engine that allows more than three times the draw distance of previous games, making for a larger, more realistic world and even greater environmental detail. It still looks like *GTA*, though, so don't fret. On the topic of sound, *Vice City's* groundbreaking funk/new wave/metal soundtrack will likely be surpassed by a soundtrack that mirrors the sounds of the early '90s. While Rockstar has yet to reveal specific tracks, the songs will cover a gamut of popular genres from that period, not just the hip-hop and rap typical of most *GTA* clones.

a hard-knock life

So while the prospects for San Andreas look bright, the only thing that remains to be seen is if Rockstar can pull off such a tremendous undertaking. With a game so big, so huge, so all-encompassing, one wonders if the 180th hour of gameplay will be as compelling as the 18th. One thing remains true to this day, though, and that's that no one does a game like this better than Rockstar. As publishers from every side throw doppelgängers at the consumer, *GTA* has always delivered. In this, the final slice of a predestined trilogy, *GTA* will determine its legacy. Will San Andreas complete an unbreakable chain of innovation and open-ended playability, or will it be exposed as an overambitious but well-intentioned behemoth of a game? Come this October, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* will settle the argument once and for all of whether it will live up to its own legacy or crumble beneath expectations. **C+**



→ Potential carnage in a carper (van below) coming up, which proves that even a moving automobile can be used for nefarious deeds. Above-left, Carl Johnson shows up to a log cabin in the woods, which houses an informant that he must eliminate.



PIZZA MAKERS WILL LEARN TO FEAR THE NAME "ORANGE GROVE FAMILIES." BUT MAKE SURE TO WATCH YOUR DIET. OR YOU'LL GROW FAT.



tough talk:

GMR: The coming of *San Andreas* [or *III*]—in hindsight—have been telegraphed as far back as the paper-map insert that came with the *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) London double pack, which showed topographical maps for Liberty City, Vice City, and San Andreas. Why do you think the announcement of *San Andreas* came as such a surprise to the gaming community? Is *San Andreas* the unofficial conclusion to what seems like a trilogy that began with *Grand Theft Auto III*?

SH: *San Andreas* is the official conclusion to a trilogy begun with *Grand Theft Auto III*—it's the third part in a series. The games' narratives are only loosely tied together and are not in chronological order, but it is a trilogy, [featuring] our distorted look at the East Coast around the time of the millennium [*Grand Theft Auto III*], followed by our reinterpretation of '80s Miami [*Vice City*], and, tastily, our look at early-'90s California.

GMR: The game is five times the size of *Vice City*. How difficult will it be to sustain vital and entertaining gameplay for what could be well over 200 hours of playtime?

SH: It's difficult in that making a game with strong, innovative gameplay in itself isn't a simple thing to do. It takes a really talented team of people and a lot of work and imagination—we are fortunate to have some of the strongest people in the industry at Rockstar North. The size is more of a challenge for the technology than it is for the gameplay; we have so many ideas for how to fill the state, so many things that we desperately wanted to cram in there, that there will always be something new to do or a new way to do it. Are you asking whether I think people will get bored? I hope not! The world is so alive, so varied, and so full of detail, plus we haven't really even begun to talk about the story yet. Our goal was to develop the key themes of *Grand Theft Auto*: freedom of choice and the ability to do lots of things closer to their logical conclusion; a bigger world, with much more to do in it; and much more interactivity between you and the environment, between player and lead character, and between characters within the game world.

GMR: Most games, successful or not, don't usually don't dominate the gaming universe starting with the third or fourth iteration. And even with the move into 3D, *Grand Theft Auto* has remained remarkably true to its origins. How would you explain the series suddenly catching fire on PS2, and how will *San Andreas* build on this momentum?

SH: As we have developed the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, we have always stayed true to the original core ideas that are the fundamental basis of what the game is—these ideas of the freedom to go anywhere and do anything. Although a lot of people really got the original *Grand Theft Auto* and there is a really staunch and loyal fan base that grew out of that game, some people didn't really understand and appreciate the concept and gameplay until they could engage with it visually in 3D. Moving into 3D on the PlayStation 2 really allowed the team to go to town in every area, the details, the humor, the graphics, the story, the gameplay, the city life, etc., etc. The world of *Grand Theft Auto* really took shape in 3D. The seeds were there in 2D, but it was in 3D that we were really able to make it its own place, and it was with *Grand Theft Auto III* that the chemistry of the team really came together perfectly for the first time. However, these key design ideals—

the
godfathergmr interview
with sam houser,
president
rockstar games

➔ He's presided over one of the most successful and—they hate it when we use this word—controversial videogame series of all time. He's Sam Houser, Rockstar Games' president and one of the driving forces behind *Grand Theft Auto*. The series has delighted hardcore gamers, infuriated the clueless, and most importantly, introduced videogames to a whole new audience. Love it or hate it, but people still talk about it. That's what you get when you rattle the cage. When Elvis first made headlines, television networks had to film him from the waist up because his hip-shaking gyrations were deemed too risqué. So too has *Grand Theft Auto* been targeted, taunted, and taken to task for the simple crime of pushing the envelope. We love that sort of tough love, though, and in this in-depth interview, Sam Houser shoots straight from the hip.



Photo credit: Justin Lane

A LIFE OF CRIME
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

freedom and variety—are what have always set *Grand Theft Auto* apart from other games and continue to do so. In adding new content, we all have a vision for how this will fit into the whole, and it's what helps us keep things fresh—the underlying core is very strong but has not yet been taken to its logical extreme. This desire to keep pushing things is, I think, the reason for the continued success of the franchise.

All that being said, *Grand Theft Auto 1* and *2* have both sold significant numbers of copies, so [they] can scarcely be described as "underground" games—just unconventional for their time in their preference for gameplay over graphics. The games still play well—unlike a lot of early 3D games from the period.

GMR: The milieu of Liberty and Vice City was steeped in the myths of *Goodfellas* and *The Sopranos*. San Andreas tips its hat to the barrio. Discuss the shift in community for this game.

SH: Actually, I would say that *Goodfellas* and *Sopranos* were more Liberty City with the grit and grime of a New York-style city, while Vice City was more *Scarface* and *Miami Vice*, so the shift in setting and influences and references should be no surprise to people. Although rich in references and imagery from these times, places, and people, neither of these two games focused only on one community, and San Andreas won't, either—it will be full of a multitude of people with different backgrounds and personalities. It's impossible to call them a single community as such—just a location with a lot of different people living there. The West Coast in the '90s was really the epicenter of so much that was going on at that time—culturally and socially there was so much energy—both positive and negative, so it was really appealing to us, just as '80s Miami had been. But to do it right, we had to do it on a bigger scale than before.

GMR: One gameplay element that seems improved is the gunplay and armed combat. Did the dev team recognize the need for a finessed system? The game mechanics seem to be informed by lessons learned from the development of Rockstar North's own *Manhunt*.

SH: In every game we make, we are always learning and pushing ourselves harder and further, and naturally we carry over things we have learned from one project to another. I think *Manhunt*'s targeting and gunplay was really visceral to play, not so much because of the blood or violence, but because of the way it felt to shoot the weapons. We loved the way it feels and plays and wanted to bring that sense of physicality to the gunplay in *Grand Theft Auto*. However, I think we have taken it beyond what was in *Manhunt* to something that works better in the more open-plan *Grand Theft Auto* world.

GMR: San Andreas offers a more personal level of customization, such as the haircuts and non-context-sensitive outfit changes. Is this to help draw the player in even closer to the main character and his motivations, or is it purely for fun aesthetic reasons?

SH: If a player has control over where he goes, what he does, and how he does it, a natural extension to his freedom and level of interactivity with the environment is to give him control over what he looks like. We also wanted to blur the lines more between what was in-mission and part of the story and your "leisure time" in the game. These kinds of leisure-time activities really keep you connected to the environment and the character even when you aren't doing missions. It gives the player a much stronger relationship with the character they are playing as, and as a result, makes it more personal. By altering Carl's appearance, you are beginning to exist in his world, both in an obvious way—you are controlling how your character looks—but also in a less obvious way—all of your actions feel like they have consequences, and you are always in the world.

GMR: Vice City arrived a surprisingly short year after *Grand Theft Auto III* (which was still doing brisk business at the time). That's because the plot

was already written prior to the development of *Grand Theft Auto III*, so building the game around it seemed relatively straightforward. Two years will have passed between Vice City and San Andreas. Did you have to build the story and plot and script from the ground up, or was it, too, somewhat prewritten? Tell us about the origins of this game.

SH: The origins were in the previous games—how did we develop the ideas of the previous games and use them and expand on them to make something truly epic? The story and characters evolve as the game evolves, as in previous versions. We knew the location, and we knew some of the new gameplay elements we wanted to include, and everything evolves up from there. One of things we are constantly trying to improve is our storytelling skill, and I think we have taken that much further in San Andreas than in previous iterations.

GMR: Is San Andreas designed to compel players to spend as much time in the countryside as they do in the inner-city portions of the game? These parts seem to have a dash of *Smuggler's Run* to them. Is this part of the goal to create the perfect open-ended game, which *Grand Theft Auto* does so well?

SH: Well, we're always trying to make the best game we can—on any project. And we find open-plan, nonlinear games inherently more appealing than linear games. So, having to some extent pioneered "in and out of vehicle" game design, then open-city game design, now it became logical to include urban and rural locations in one continuous "level" or "world." People can spend their time where they want in the game. The game is designed to give people the choice—you can play the game where you want, to some extent—we make sure missions take you all over the map, so people should slowly learn about the surprises of the whole map.

GMR: Please tell us your overall objective goal with San Andreas. Simply to make the best game possible or total world domination? Or somewhere in between?

SH: To make something we want to play, and to make something that any fan of action gaming would want to play. ♦



grand theft auto

IT'S NOT THE SIZE. IT'S
HOW YOU USE ITrelease date: july 1997
platform: pc/ps1

Retroview

don't sweat the technique

➔ After 15 quadrillion copies sold, the *GTA* series shows no signs of slowing down. The most successful videogame series in history (even your mom has played the game) looks ready to wreck every other game publisher's quarterly earnings for the fourth year in a row (last year's *GTA Double Pack* proved a fortuitous stopgap for Rockstar). *GMR* takes a look back and sizes up the most influential videogame series of the decade.

Although it may seem quaint today, *Grand Theft Auto* was something of a shock upon its release back in 1996. Never before had a videogame 1) allowed gamers to roleplay as a two-bit criminal in a distinctly underworld setting (modeled after the prototypical urban setting of New York City), or 2) contained so much blue language. The shock value of naughty language alone is short lived, however. The most eye-opening element of *GTA* was its embrace of 2D graphics, which swam like a salmon upstream against the rush of the 3D movement. The game was like some open-ended bastard child of *Spy Hunter* and *Carillo's Way*. You don't need the benefit of hindsight to realize that even in 1996, the graphics weren't going to impress anyone, but then the *GTA* series has never been about the graphics.

Cleverly disguising a laundry list of RPG-like feign quests in the trappings of a car-stealing, cop-avoiding, pedestrian-filleting underworld crime drama, *Grand Theft Auto* earned itself a devoted cult audience that championed its unique gameplay and refreshing outlook on how to present a video game. Plus, even now, the thrill of jacking tools out of their Matchbox-sized cars (each of which handled uniquely depending on the type of vehicle) and peeing out around city streets with the fuzz hot on your tail is undeniable. What made the funky graphics digestible was that it was the game itself was solid, and the series had—and still has—a great sense of humor. Never before had it felt so good to be so bad. While longtime fans no doubt already have either the original PC or PlayStation version, latecomers to the party can now download the original game for free (on PC) at www.rockstargames.com/classics/gta.htm. Not a bad way to check out the humble beginnings of the series that would revolutionize the industry.

While gamers who latched on to the series starting with *GTA3* might find the original too rudimentary to bear, for anyone else with an open mind it's worth picking up (or downloading) on the cheap. Whether you're interested in exploring the series' origins, or simply need a fun little game to pop in your PSone during a quiet weekend getaway, *Grand Theft Auto* holds up as worthy gaming.



GTA London

A BLOODY GOOD TIME
IN JOLLY OLD ENGLAND

release date: april 1999
platform: PC/PS1

Initially released as a mod for *GTA*, and then as an official expansion pack, *London 1969* was eventually repackaged and bundled with the original *Grand Theft Auto*, offering a new city and a new era in time to explore *GTA* style. The only *GTA* to actually take place in an authentic real-world setting, *London* adds landmark sites such as the Tower of London and Big Ben, along with 20 new types of cars typical of the times. The soundtrack was also retrofitted to the times, and to this day, *London* stands out as one of the most distinctive—albeit short-lived—iterations in the series.

An interesting inclusion in the *London 1969* pack is the paper map that reveals the layout of—wait for it—Liberty City, Vice City, and San Andreas. Which means that the setting of *San Andreas*, the game, should come as little surprise, since DMA [the former developer, Doesn't Mean Anything, now reborn as Rockstar North] foreshadowed its coming as far back as 1998.

grand theft auto 2

STATUS QUO

release date: september 1999
platform: dc/pc/ps1

Although *GTA2* was no "worse" than the games that had come before it, the formula was wearing thin on the *GTA* template. While holding on to the 2D theme was admirable in the early 32-bit era of change, by the time the Dreamcast version rolled out, people were wondering how long DMA would mine this particular vein. Sure, *GTA2* featured new lighting effects, sharper graphics, more gangs, more cars, and a smoother framerate. But when titles like *Driver 2* were swiping the *GTA* formula—in 3D, no less—*GTA2* figures as little more than an overshadowed footnote in the series than its predecessors or sequels. It carried the torch but otherwise did little else to further the cause. The cover image of a taxi in rush-hour traffic as viewed from the perspective of a rooftop sniper was almost recognitive of chilling, future events.

grand theft auto iii

THE SHOT HEARD
AROUND THE WORLD

release date: october 2001
platform: pc/ps2/xbox



In a medium full of starry highlights, the success of *Grand Theft Auto III* is a curiosity. Although it didn't arrive with the fanfare of, say, a new *Mario* or *Metal Gear Solid* game, five months after its release, it was still selling in the hundreds of thousands of copies a week. Talk about staying power! The fact of the matter is that the longer in tooth it got, the more it sold, unlike the usual first-week sales spike typical of, say, a *Final Fantasy* title. Number crunching aside, *GTA3* fulfilled the potential of its premise. It introduced the series to 3D graphics, offended senators, put the *Driver* series in its place, and launched a thousand imitators all in one go. Not bad for a series that, up until *GTA3*, was running out of chances.

But the third time's a charm, even if it was really the fourth. *GTA3* established a whole new precedent for the notion of "open ended." Both hardcore gamers and newcomers alike could enjoy the game for equally unique reasons. Hardcore citizens who wanted to complete 100 percent of the game had dozens and dozens of hours of gameplay in store for them. Whether you were running jobs for various double-crossing crime lords, hijacking big rigs, or merely racing around the streets against various street gangs, opportunity for felonious pursuits was never in short supply. More casual gamers who would never finish the game could—like with any *Mario* game—pick up *GTA3* for five minutes, steal a few cars, beat up some pedestrians, or do plenty of other things with little to no investment and still walk away feeling satisfied. Such is the broad appeal and all-around playability of *Grand Theft Auto III*. The only blemish on *GTA3*'s track record is a janky on-foot combat system that made targeting enemies more challenging than was necessary.

Ironically, the groundwork laid by the early 2D games has buffered the next-gen installments of the series with a backdrop and mythology as rich as any found in a fantasy-based game. Thankfully, *GTA* doesn't require you to roll a 20-sided die for a saving throw versus trolls. This concession to modern times so completely captured the zeitgeist of the community it made video games—for better or for worse—worthy of the evening headline news.

grand theft auto: vice city

YOU SPIN ME 'ROUND

release date: october 2002
platform: pc/ps2/xbox

Unlike every *GTA* clone that seems to equate "urban" with "a gratuitous hip-hop soundtrack, a leather jacket, and some guns," *Vice City* ditched the urban milieu of "now" and time-warped back to the neon-soaked, leg-warmered, Hawaiian-shirted, synthesizer-dominated sounds of the *Miami Vice* '80s, and to great effect, too. *Vice City* raised the bar so high on videogame production values that other companies are—to this day, two years later—struggling to gain parity. Featuring an all-star cast of Ray Liotta, Tom Sizemore, Dennis Hopper, Burt Reynolds, Danny Trejo, Gary Busey, Lee Majors, Fairuz Balk, Deborah Harry, Jenna Jameson, and even Philip Michael "Tubbs" Thomas on voice patrol, anything less in a videogame these days seems meager by comparison.

If that wasn't enough to raise eyebrows, then *Vice City* exceeded in the soundtrack department like no other game before it. Every *GTA* game has featured a broad selection of selectable radio stations [with jingles composed by in-house musicians], but for *Vice City*, Rockstar paired with Epic Records to bathe the game in the sounds of the '80s. It includes Latino hits such as Tito Puente's "Mambo Gozon," early rap classics such as Grandmaster Flash's "The Message," the apex of new wave hits such as Frankie Goes to Hollywood's "Two Tribes," major-league No. 1's to "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson, and even heavy hair metal, courtesy of Twisted Sister's "I Wanna Rock." The list goes on, but the selection of songs in *Vice City* is so enormous that Epic released a seven-CD *GTA: Vice City* box set to commemorate the event. Expect *San Andreas*' soundtrack to eclipse even this seemingly insurmountable achievement with songs drawn from early '90s West Coast culture.

Vice City added motorcycles [with great control—you can do wheelies, stoppies, and burn a circle from a dead stop!], better graphics, the same fun open-ended gameplay, and a slightly improved [but still not perfect] targeting system. The result? *Vice City*'s success surpassed even that of *GTA3*, selling 11.5 million copies worldwide, making it the most successful videogame in the known universe. **E+**



NOW

Spider-Man 2, DRIVER, and Lineage II. What do these three games have in common? They all came out about a month ago. Not our fault! We couldn't get Spider-Man 2 early enough because of the movie studio's paranoia, Lineage II is a MMORPG that needs an in-depth look, and DRIVER just wasn't ready. And the boxed copy still might not be...read on.



HOW WE RATE

1 RUFFNESS 2 ONSTANDLY 3 PITTFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMA SCORING SYSTEM

WARNING: WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE PROVIDED, DIFFERENT DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY.

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

AMAZING ISLAND	GC	093
ASTRO BOY	OBA	082
ATHENS 2004	PSE	082
COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS	PSE/XB	092
CRIMSON TEARS	PSE	089
DRIVER	PSE/XB	083
ECHO NIGHT: BEYOND	PSE/XB	094
ESPN NFL 03	PSE/XB	087
GHOSTHUNTER	PSE	096
GROUND CONTROL II	PC	088
HAMTARO: HAM-HAM GAMES	OBA	094
LINEAGE II	PC	085
MAGNET NFL 2003	GC/PSE/XB	086
NCAA FOOTBALL 2005	GC/PSE/XB	087
PURVO POP FEVER	GC	092
RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW	XB	093
RIVER CITY RANSOM EX	OBA	081
SHOWDOWN: LEGENDS OF WRESTLING	PSE/XB	081
SPIDER-MAN 2	GC/PSE/XB	079
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	GC/PSE	084
STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME	PSE	091
STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION	PSE	095
TODD MCFARLANE'S EVIL PROPHECY	PSE	095





→ As anyone who has ever been can tell you, New York City is huge. And Treyarch did an amazing job re-creating the city that, if not entirely to pinpoint accuracy and scale, is close enough to take the real thing. Don't let the size intimidate, however, because once Spidey upgrades his swing speed to about level 4, going from the north end of the island to the south is a matter of mere moments, and there's a helpful map in case you get lost. But with the saving mechanics being so great, you might just get lost on purpose.



SPIDER-MAN 2

GO GET 'EM, TIGER

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUBLISHER
ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER
TREYARCH
PRICE
\$49.99
RELEASE
DATE
OCTOBER 1, 2001
PLAYERS
1
COUNTRY
U.S.A.

➔ Like the movie from which it was derived, *Spider-Man 2* is a long-awaited gift from comic-book heaven for fans of the amazing arachno-man. Previously seen in two fun-but-flawed titles during the PS1 era, the weblinger comes storming back on a generation of hardware that can realize the full potential of the *Spider-Man* myths: an incredible rendering of New York City that's rife with skyscrapers, supervillains, and street crime.

First and foremost, *Spider-Man* is about flying through the cityscape at breakneck speeds, swinging from web to web, sprinting along the side of a 40-story office building, then launching in

the opposite direction, performing a graceful dive, and—moments before being squashed on the pavement below—finding a well-placed flagpole that anchors your web as you swing through the busy traffic on the street. We've seen it in the movies, and Treyarch has done an incredible job translating that awe-inspiring feeling into a game. Whereas the previous *Spider-Man* games provided an invisible "ceiling" allowing you to swing anywhere, *Spider-Man 2*'s engine requires you to anchor your web to a physical structure higher than you are. What that does, aside from preserving a feeling of "realism" (we are talking comic books here), is to force Spidey to

make some fairly impressive jumps and aerial maneuvers. Because a fall from great heights can do significant damage, there's a small sense of jeopardy when swinging through the city. But because Spidey's move set is so varied and the control spot on (especially after a few hours of acclimation), you're never recklessly hurtling into building edifices or getting caught in the trees in Central Park. Even the nonessential acrobatic moves you can unlock add so much to the character. For all intents and purposes, the swinging portion of the game is flawless.

But that's not to say the game as a whole couldn't use more polish: hand-to-hand combat, especially against a



[GRAND THEFT SPIDER] OPEN AND CLOSED

➔ Much of the extra stuff in *Spider-Man 2* is somewhat repetitive. Going up to an "informant" and asking for info will generate either some sort of rescue mission (save a couple of people on a sinking boat, take an injured worker to the hospital in time), foiling a crime-in-progress (store robbery, carjacking), or just spawn a fight with a gang of thugs. Timed races through the city mix things up a little, but it's all stuff you'd be doing anyways. An extra set of organized missions would have gone a long way in keeping things fresh. **C**



large group of thugs, is clunky at best and irritating at worst. Spidey has a ton of moves and attacks, but because there's no real tutorial to teach you what works best when, the fun of fighting as Spider-Man isn't fully realized.

The other issue has to do with pacing. The movie that the game is based on is only a couple of hours long, so even with the extra padding of B-list villains such as Shocker, Mysterio, Rhino, and the never-even-alluded-to Black Cat, the story can wrap up very quickly, even before the in-game progress counter reaches 50 percent. Of course, it is possible to intersperse the story elements with random crime stopping, but oftentimes events will be

triggered, keeping Spidey on plot. It's only after Doc Ock is defeated that you have all the time in the world for freelance superheroing. The problem there is that many of the elements that make *Spider-Man 2* open-ended are just too repetitive and lack the dynamic problem-solving approach of other cohesive-world games, such as *Grand Theft Auto*. The man perilously hanging from the top of the building is always wearing a yellow jumpsuit. The man who has injured himself and needs hospitalization is always sitting on a manhole cover in an orange jumpsuit. And since there's no more story after 50 percent of the game, finishing the other 50 percent proves tiresome after

foiling the 33rd purse snatcher of the day. Yes, it's Spider-Man's job, but life sure is boring without supervillains spicing things up.

Yet that remains a large part of Spider-Man's appeal. Great power requires great responsibility. And despite the shortcomings, Treyarch is responsible for one of the better superhero games in recent years. **C+**

—Andrew Plister

2ND OPINION

No single gameplay mechanic in recent years beats the web-slinging you do in *Spider-Man 2*—it's just plain awesome. Sadly, the actual game composed around this mechanic and environment fails to impress, with an unpolished combat system and mostly lame villains. **C-**

—Chris Baker
Previous editor, GMR

GMR NEWS **8th**

BETTER THAN CAYMANAN
OFFLINE COUSIN OF CITY OF HEROES
WAIT FOR IT: X-MEN LEGENDS



RIVER CITY RANSOM EX

THE BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN

TEEN | GBA

➔ The NES is full of classic, memorable, and influential games—games that made their mark on the world and continue to be fondly remembered, remade, and replayed. The original *River City Ransom*, it can be argued, is the biggest cult hit in the NES' library.

Not as popular or well known as *Double Dragon*, which was created by the same team, *River City Ransom* was years ahead of the curve, blending RPG elements and a huge variety of moves into its simple beat-'em-up style. That the game did this with genuinely funny dialogue in an era when Nintendo's own games contained such incoherent text as "I AM ERROR" [*Zelda II*] is almost a miracle.

River City Ransom EX has a number of new features that make it stand out from its progenitor. The graphics have been given a tasty makeover, and new regular and special moves have been

implemented for the heroes—it's shocking what you can get done with just two buttons.

But that doesn't mean that *ACREX* is perfect. The most criminal omission from the new version is a lack of multiplayer—the very factor that took the original from merely cool to essential. Worse, all of the sloppy and primitive design of the NES version is replicated. Incomprehensible level layout? No direction? It's all here. If you don't have fond and forgiving memories of the original, you'll very likely be less than impressed.

Worse, your saved game keeps track of your stats only, forcing you to play through the whole game whenever you turn it on. Also, it's way too hard to upgrade your character, thanks to the excessive cost of special moves. Ultimately, we would have been better served by an all-new *River City Ransom*. **C-**

—Christian Nutt

SHOWDOWN: LEGENDS OF WRESTLING

OLDER, BUT NOT WISER

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | X3

➔ There's not enough nostalgia either on Earth or in the entirety of the cosmos to redeem the shambling wreck that is *Showdown: Legends of Wrestling*. Not even a visit from Ted "The Million Dollar Man" DiBiase and subsequent \$750,000 "gift" would serve to make this bitter pill go down more easily.

Here, think concentrated nostalgia put into bullet form and shot directly into the hearts of wrestling game fans. *Showdown's* roster holds some 70-plus grapplers of yore, and no one can rightly fault the game's roster—it is sensational and serves as *Showdown's* great draw.

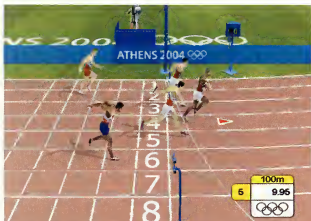
Inside the squared circle—meaning, where it counts—things break down. Computer-controlled wrestlers possess the artificial intelligence of wood shavings; if a player's wrestler climbs the corner turnbuckle, an enemy will often waddle up and politely wait to be smushed by a leaping attack. Sadly, the A.I. wrestlers react to foes perched on the turnbuckle maybe only one time

out of five, and players will be able to pull off the same corner-based attack six, seven, eight, or more times in a row. A plodding pace serves to slow down the showdown—something as simple as escaping from a steel cage is an extended, boring affair.

The jury has yet to render its decision on the matter of whether it's comedy gold or more sad than watching baby seals get clubbed when a wrestler recoils from a punch thrown by a competitor who is 1) approximately 15 feet away, and 2) has his back to the grappler he's punching. **C-**

—Greg Orlando





ATHENS 2004

ON YOUR MARKS. GET SET. YAWN

There hasn't been a truly memorable Olympics-style game since Konami's *Track & Field* on NES. While SCEA's *Athens 2004* doesn't try to reinvent the wheel, it makes meaningful nods to its past that are worth paying attention to.

Anyone who has touched this type of game in the past 15 years won't have any trouble jumping in. Most events consist of you rapidly tapping X and Circle back and forth to build up speed or power until a "Power Lock" kicks in, at which point you hit several timed markers. Be sure to finesse a technique of high-speed tappin' that doesn't cause immediate fatigue or your fingers will be numb by the end of the second round. Laying the controller on the ground and switching between index fingers seems to work well, but everyone has their own variation.

Gamers with nostalgic memories of the NES Power Pad are sure to get a kick out of the party mode. Hook up that stuffed-away *Dance Dance Revolution* mat and many events become rearranged to get the blood pumping. In gymnastics, you follow DDR-style steps in rhythm, while a

more traditional event (i.e., running) has players smashing on the pad to build up power using Up and X before executing other actions with Circle. Oddly, though, if you stomp too fast, the game has trouble keeping up. Using the pad makes a ton of noise, but it's way more entertaining than using the DualShock.

Though the Olympics aren't really fast paced in real life, that doesn't mean the interactive version has to be so bland. The hideous character models are blocky and look far more akin to zombies than top-tier athletes, and there's no attempt to stylize or jazz up the game's look whatsoever. Competing and breaking records proves to be the main source of excitement, but wearing out your fingers gets old fast.

The inclusion of dance-mat support is novel—even if it's ripped straight from the old-school textbooks. Olympics fans looking for a complement to the upcoming Summer Games are going to be happy, but most will want to pass on this mostly uneventful trip to the Games. **C-**

Patrick Klepek



ASTRO BOY

THE ORIGINAL BOY WONDER

EVERYONE | GBA

If the world in which we live were designed by the folks at Treasure, we would walk as paper people down 2D streets lined by cardboard buildings. Masters of the art and clearly more comfortable in the medium than in the third dimension, Treasure has crafted the most gorgeous old-school 2D game since its own Sega Saturn classic, *Guardian Heroes*.

Set in sprawling, detail-soaked environments more beautiful than any of the handheld *Castlevanias* and more action-packed than *Metroid*, *Astro Boy* is a shooter, side-scrolling beat-em-up, and comprehensive homage to the late Osamu Tezuka rolled up into one. Anyone expecting a quick recap of the animated series' events should brace themselves for an encyclopedic crash course in Tezuka lore. Characters from every corner of his vast canon of work make an appearance in *Astro Boy*, context be damned, meaning that everyone from Tezuka's past—including Pook, Sharaku, Rock, Big X, and Magma—make an appearance, whether it makes sense or not.

The multitude of characters that appears in *Astro Boy* serves an auxiliary function, though. For every character Astro discovers (some he'll run across in scripted events, others remain more cleverly hidden), he gains an attribute point, which is assigned by the gamer. By making a concerted effort to find these hidden characters, gamers can boost Astro's HP, finger laser, jet boots, punch attacks, and more.

The guts of the game, however, are the running, flying, punching, and

laser blasting that Astro does so well, and Treasure has somehow managed to condense all of his abilities (or at least the ones he would use in battle) on the GBA and its limited button count. As enemies of all shapes and sizes come from every angle, Astro's palette of attacks comes easily, although a few special moves are a little tricky to manage.

The problem is that this extremely linear action game comes in brief pockets of actual combat, highlighting Treasure's tendency to link together a series of brutal boss battles and call it a game. In the case of *Astro Boy*, it kind of works, if only as a surprisingly challenging, exceptionally beautiful time capsule of Tezuka's greatest hits. **A-**

James Mielke





→ This screenshot might look funny to you, it looked funny to us when Tanner dropped through the ground and into the enchanted world of blue and white geometry. "Is this heaven?" Tanner asks. "No, it's a bug."

DRIVER 3R

DON'T DRINK AND CODE

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

➔ Atari's much-lauded *Driver* series has finally arrived after several delays, and it lives up to its name: Players can get behind the wheel of countless vehicles, including speedboats, pickup trucks, forklifts, motorcycles, and dozens of cars.

Unlike *GTA's* open-ended gameplay, *DRIVER 3R* is both linear and confined. Vehicle-based missions include pursuit, surveillance, wanton destruction, and losing a tail. An almost equal number of missions occur on foot, putting the player in a third-person shooter as Tanner kills dozens of gang members via a slew of firearms. As one would expect, cops become involved if a player breaks too many civil liberties.

Unfortunately, *DRIVER 3R* has flaws as irritating as a broken muffler. Several missions are clearly intended to be defeated in only one specific fashion, but instead of corralling a player to a single end, the game seemingly invites open-ended gameplay that then rewards creativity with glitches. Objective arrows point to inaccessible destinations, bullets fly through walls, and trying to climb a ladder out of the ocean often results in being teleported back into a boat.

DRIVER 3R's A.I. acts as though it's had one for the road: Gang members not only stand around while their comrades are shot, escorted NPCs will run directly into enemy fire. Similar

problems plague the game's vehicles: A truck in Nice that must be tailed collides with pedestrians and other cars before crashing into a wall, resulting in mission failure through no fault of the player.

Had Atari spent more time tuning its engine, it could have had a hit, but instead of racing to the checkered flag, *DRIVER 3R* spins out. **C-**

—Doug Trueman



2ND OPINION

DRIVER 3R, or as I like to call it, *Driver 3*, is a bit of a mess. The driving physics feel all right, and the game doesn't look necessarily bad, but everything that is supposed to be lauded about this game feels to register with such a big budget and marketing push behind it, the result is unimpressive. **C-**

—Andrew Pieter

PUBLISHER: ATARI
DEVELOPER: GIGAWATT
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
GENRE: DRIVING

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

SETTING OFF ALARMS

MATURE | GC

It's fairly obvious that Ubisoft's GameCube support, at least when it comes to the Tom Clancy franchise, is an afterthought at best. Though it's difficult to find fault with that approach (GC's demographic makeup and prohibitive online attitude make the system ill suited for the Clancy games), when the game's technical quality is noticeably worse than other versions' and major components have to be axed, one wonders why it keeps putting forth the effort.

As established by the original Xbox release of *Pandora Tomorrow* and further emphasized by the splendid PS2 version, the spies versus mercenaries multiplayer mode is the best reason to own the game. With that, or any other multiplayer mode, being completely absent from the GameCube version, it's difficult to justify the price tag when the

single-player campaign offers little lasting value. And the same complaints lodged against Fisher's missions still apply: Alarms raised by guards are often unfair and arbitrary, and trial-and-error puzzle solving is encouraged over a dynamic, multifaceted approach. The GameCube version also seems to contain a few bugs. Some are minor (a guard failing to investigate a whistle in the dark from 15 feet away), others are level ending (using a grenade to take out a guard "destroys" the vital data stick he's holding, thus trapping Sam in the level).

If the only system you own is a GameCube (and woe is you) and you're interested in what the franchise is about, then a weekend rental is in order as an appetizer. Just be aware that you're missing out on the proverbial meat and potatoes. **C-**
—Andrew Pfister



PLAYERS	1	PRICE	\$49.99
DEV	UBISOFT	PLAYERS	1
11	AVAILABLE WIN	DEV	FRANCE

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN ROGUE OPS
NOT AS GOOD AS MGS THE TWIN SNAKES
WAIT FOR IT MGS3 SNAKE EATER



→ Like in the GameCube version, certain graphical sacrifices had to be made in order to preserve the overall feel of *Pandora*. The most notable hits come in Sam's animation and the night-vision and thermal-vision effects. But it still looks darn good, and better than the PS2 part of the original *Splinter Cell*.



SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

WITHIN MISSION PARAMETERS

MATURE | PS2

Considering that this game has already been out on Xbox for some time, waffling on about how great the PS2 version is without providing a little bit of perspective is useless. There are differences between the two versions, and you need to be aware of them. Some of them are good, and some of them are bad, so let's not beat around the bush.

On the good side, the PS2 version has some extra stuff. There's a new jungle mission, which is set in Indonesia and adds a little meat to the game's bones. The PS2 game also tracks your performance and provides a summary at the end of each mission. If you revisit completed missions, you get to try alternate paths and experience some altered gameplay parameters. Mission situation reports can be heard through the headset, and Ubisoft is keen to point out that this is the "first game to use moving dynamic lighting technology for the PS2." What does that mean? The lights move.

On the downside, you're going to

have to bite your lip and accept the fact that the Xbox version does look a bit better. Despite the fact that yes, it does move, the lighting on PS2 doesn't look as good, and some of the animation is a little lacking. Sam's mouth doesn't move when he talks, for example (big deal, but there's also stiffness to a lot of the movement that you won't see in the Xbox version. Some of the missions are structured a little differently, so if you've played the Xbox version, you might get confused).

All said, though, it's still awesome, and outside of *SOCOM 2*, it's arguably the best online game for PS2. **C+**
—John Davison

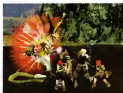
PLAYERS	1	PRICE	\$49.99
DEV	UBISOFT	PLAYERS	1
11	AVAILABLE WIN	DEV	FRANCE

GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN PS1 OPS
ON PAR WITH SOCOM 2
WAIT FOR IT: SPLINTER CELL 3



→ Do not be fooled by the glowing blue and green prettiness in these screenshots. Lineage II is a tedious affair. With better-balanced MMOs like *Final Fantasy XI* available (and with a lower monthly fee), there's little reason to play.



LINEAGE II: THE CHAOTIC CHRONICLE

IT'S LIKE WORK. ONLY YOU PAY TO DO IT

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: NCSoft
DEVELOPER: NCSoft
PRICE: \$24.99
ONLINE: AVAILABLE NOW
RELEASE: THIRDSIDE OF MOUNTAIN
COUNTRY: KOREA

➔ Despite *Lineage II*'s incredible success in Asia, it's hard to imagine how this game could do well in the United States. This MMORPG is so difficult, long, and slow that playing it feels more like work than a game.

Most RPGs keep you interested by giving you something to look forward to in every level: new items, new skills, better stats. Instead of facilitating this and allowing you to make unique characters, everything feels cookie-cutter in *Lineage II*. You're either a warrior or a mystic, and you can't branch out till level 20. You can't choose which stats to improve as you level up either, and you can't even learn new skills until level 7. Items are also

prohibitively expensive. This slow progression means that each level feels like the last, and the only thing you have to look forward to is more of the same.

The gameplay doesn't distract from the monotony of developing your character. Most of the monsters are boring, the quests are lackluster, and combat involves doing the same actions over and over (e.g., if you're a mystic, you cast a combat spell, run away, then do it again until the other guy's dead). The leveling treadmill is almost unplayable, unless you're prepped by a few gallons of espresso.

Lineage II's selling points—extensive PVP, castle sieges, and dragons—were not implemented at launch. The only

common player interactions these days are people trying to sell items at ridiculous prices, begging for money, or cursing about Koreans farming the rare monsters. There might be the basis for an interesting game here, and once everything's implemented, it might actually be fun. But unless you're patient and hardworking to the point of masochism, you'll never see it. **C-**

—Di Luo

GMR NO. 1 **S/D**

BETTER THAN ASTORIA
NOT AS GOOD AS FINAL FANTASY XI
WAIT FOR IT! EVERQUEST II

2ND OPINION

Unlike *City of Heroes*, NCSoft's other popular MMO at the moment, *Lineage II* is an unrelenting grind through a world we've been through before. The monthly fee is too steep (something it actually shares with COH), and by the time you get to where you want to be, you're that much poorer in both time and money. **C-**
—Andrew Pilster

BLUE 42! HUT HUT!

WE'D ASK IF YOU ARE READY. BUT WE ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER

Yes, football season is once again upon us. Be it drinking in the dorm room at 10 in the morning, or flipping on the Sunday Ticket the second you get home from church, the best way to complement your football fantasies is with these three gridiron games. The lack of *NFL Fever* and *NFL GameDay* means you can't go wrong....

MADDEN NFL 2005 HAIL MARY TO THE KING

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

➔ It doesn't matter if you're into football or not, you've probably heard of *Madden football*. The game has had a huge impact on the way we look at sports, and this year's version has exceeded expectations again. *Madden NFL 2005* maintains and improves upon its strengths, making it an amazing videogame to play.

Madden 2004 introduced offensive Playmaker controls that allowed players to change offensive plays on the fly. Now you can do that on defense as well. If you know someone loves to run the quarterback, you can Playmaker a lineman individually, put him in QB spy, and catch the runner behind the line of scrimmage. Now, taking note of your opponent's tendencies is genuinely useful. The new "hit stick" allows you to execute incredibly hard and satisfying hits on players with a simple flick of the right analog stick—it's a subtle addition that will definitely get the trash talk going. And on top of all of this, Madden still has that fluid, fast-paced action that makes it enormously fun.

Having Tony Bruno doing a fictional radio show in the background of the new franchise mode is an imaginative touch. The hilarious create-a-fan feature allows players to build superfans with a ton of options. You pick the skin color, style of clothes, hair, body build, and accessories from a list of zany presets. It's a great source of comic relief.

Madden's online mode has new features that flesh out the experience of simulated football. There is a real-time ticker that scrolls across the bottom of the screen giving live updates of real games, helping suspend the disbelief that the games you're playing take place in the real world. The game also includes a new system to help filter out people who don't want to play fairly. Finally, you can go to lobbies that only allow people in if they're serious about playing *Madden* online. There are also small minigames online, like Rush Attack, that give you a quick 60 seconds of competitive action.

Again, *Madden* brings a superb game to the table. It still doesn't own the graphics category, but *Madden* controls better with that same great pace it's known to have. Fans of the franchise will get the most they've ever gotten out of the game, and newcomers will finally understand what all the hype is about. **A-**

—Jason Allen

PLAY ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV. ELECTRONIC ARTS
PUB. AUGUST
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-2 ONLINE
GEN: U.S.A.

GMR 9th

BETTER THAN: YEP, LAST YEAR'S VERSION
NOT AS GOOD AS: PROBABLY NEXT YEAR'S VERSION
WAIT FOR IT: YEP, NEXT YEAR'S VERSION



➔ Fans of last year's version remember the rushing terror that was Michael Vick. Good news (well, bad for Falcons fans). EA's toned down Slick Vick, so he's less of a rushing threat. Still, we wouldn't take him lightly.



ESPN NFL 2K5

LITERALLY. A POOR MAN'S MADDEN

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

➔ Until recently, some were resigned to believe that *Madden* had officially shelocked *ESPN NFL*, with the *ESPN* franchise due to join the Football Hall of Failure alongside Ryan Leaf, Scott Norwood, and the XFL. Desperate time, brilliant measure: *ESPN NFL 2K5* called a Hail Mary, opting to sell for a reduced price of \$20. Touchdown, underdogs.

The great surprise in all of this is that *ESPN NFL 2K5* isn't just a good game, it's a great one. And it matches up well against *Madden*, its lone competitor (GameDay and Fever took the year off). It looks like *ESPN's* hoping its situation mirrors one of the memorable scenarios from its classic NFL games mode, specifically the one that took place in January 1993, when the Houston Oilers led the Buffalo Bills 35-3 in the third quarter, yet the Bills somehow won. It marked the greatest comeback in NFL history, and *ESPN's* hoping for just such a comeback against *Madden*.

What makes this comeback a possibility is the outstanding use of the *ESPN* license. There's a watchable SportsCenter at the end of every week that features highlights of what went

down—full motion with the hard drive, still shots without. Plus, the *ESPN*-style overlays are so brilliant.

Of course, overlays are useless without great gameplay, and this game has that, too. The amount of animations makes it feel like anything can happen. When you run the ball on fourth and one, you get a very real sense of how far three feet can be.

Win or lose on the sales charts, *ESPN's* done what sports fans love and bookies hate: it's made things interesting. While *Madden's* a better game in the way that Peyton Manning is better than Steve McNair (marginally), it'll be fun to see if *ESPN* can beat the daunting spread with its budget-price equalizer. **C+**

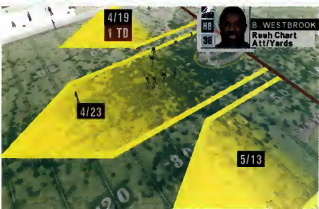
—Todd Zuniga

PS2	SEGA	PRICE	\$19.95
DEV	VISUAL CONCEPTS	PLAYERS	1-4 ONLINE
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

PEERLESS PRICE

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN A HIGH ANKLE SPRAIN
NOT AS GOOD AS DIRECTV'S NFL SUNDAY TICKET
ON PAR WITH MADDEN 2005



PS2	ELECTRONIC ARTS	PRICE	\$19.95
DEV	ELECTRONIC ARTS	PLAYERS	1-2 ONLINE
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

5TH YEAR

GMR 8¹⁰

ALSO TRY: MADDEN NFL 2005
COULD GO WITHOUT "AGILE" RUNNING SYSTEM
PRAY FOR IT: ONLINE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

NCAA FOOTBALL 2005

THE OLD COLLEGE TRY

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

➔ One of the first rules of writing is to know your audience. Well, in this case, the audience is the approximately 1.6 million gamers who purchased *NCAA 2004*. Consensus opinion last year was that *NCAA* held the trophy as the best football game of the year, and possibly of all time.

So let's get it over with: *NCAA 2005* is not as good as *NCAA 2004*. It's more on the level of colossal disappointment, actually, considering the hype surrounding *2005's* release. But with significant sales numbers come similar expectations. One such expectation is that the actual gameplay, defined as how college football is represented to Joe Gamer, will be improved upon. That's where *2005* fumbles.

Beyond the home-field advantage (which is a nice touch) and somewhere past the matchup stick lies a little issue called gameplay tuning. This year's

defensive pursuit is amped up to the point where breaking big runs (over 30 yards) or catching a pass and getting big yards after the catch (other than a streak) is nearly impossible. There's a certain "school of fish" defensive tracking that squelches the ability to be creative in the open field. Not only does this kill your passion for offense, as your skill guys all seem the same, but it makes defense a yawn, too. Who cares if you take control of a guy and miss the tackle...another defender will be two steps away. College football without a wide-open, big-play feel is like Jessica Simpson without the T&A.

Maybe this is all over your head. Maybe you'll flip over the brilliant dynasty execution, slicker visuals, or the fact that, fleas and all, it's still a solid football game. And you know, we just can't blame you. **C-**

—Dan Leahy

TEEN | PSY

The spiritual descendant of Dream Factory's classic *Tobal 2*, *Crimson Tears* offers simple dungeon-crawling beat-em-up thrills reminiscent of a 3D *Duino*. Dragon with a twist. By punneling enemies in succession and knitting together multiple-hit combos, players earn greater rewards, both in monetary value (good for buying equipment) and item drops (good for crafting equipment). Simple beat-em-up duties and fussy graphics aside, one of *Tears'* most unique features is the ability to create your own weapons by combining found items liberated from dead enemies. The more common parts are used to create functional yet unexceptional weapons, but rare item drops can be used to make high-powered weapons. It's this sort of reuse

The visuals are the standout feature of *Tears*. While the randomly generated backgrounds are fairly stark, the cel-shaded characters are fluidly animated and lavishly detailed, despite some blushtworthy fan service in the outfit designs. This is one of the slickest-looking games on PS2. Throughout the eight levels, a few flaws rear their ugly heads, most notably the repetition in the find-the-key and unlock-the-door action, as well as some overly dark levels and plenty of cheap hits. But if you're looking for a no-brainer barroom brawler that looks as good as it plays, this should be your first consideration. **B+**

—James Mielke



TEEN | PC

GC2 completely ditches base building and economy management. You start with a set number of units that each have well-balanced and

The nigh-amazing production values enhance the already-solid gameplay; combat is flashy and loud, marred only by the accent-heavy voiceovers. Alas, the A.I. still needs some fine-tuning, and the camera takes a while to get used to. Still, *GC2* is an eminently playable strategy game that feels like a mixture of *Star Wars* and *Black Hawk Down* and is a worthy game for those who tire of playing men in metal skirts for their strategy fix. **B+**

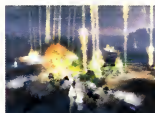
Thierry Nauen



ITEM	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
100	CALCUM	\$20.99
101	BREAM FACTORY	\$1.99
102	WORLD'S LARGEST BOOK	\$1.99

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN DYNAMITE COP
NOT AS GOOD AS LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
WAIT FOR IT, SPIKEOUT: BATTLE STREET



PUB	VIVENDI UNIVERSAL	PRICE	\$48.99
DEV	MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
SEL	AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT	GENRE	ADVENTURE

GMR COMMANDING 7/10

BETTER THAN COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERAL
NOT AS GOOD AS. MYTH
WENT FOR IT WASLAMMER 4000. DAWN OF WAR

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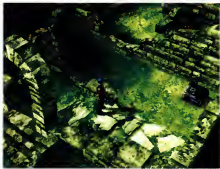
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→ Star Ocean's dangers are long, twisty, and have lots of secrets. If you cover all the ground, in fact, you get a special item. Whether you want to drive yourself insane by trying to tag every little corner, well... that's your problem.



STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

LIKE DELICIOUS RPG CANDY

TEEN | PS2

➔ The hidden treasure in the Square Enix merger is clearly *Star Ocean* developer Tri-Ace. Its *Valkyrie Profile* for PS1 is one of the system's best RPGs—and also one of its most routinely overlooked titles.

Valkyrie Profile, sadly, will remain the pinnacle of Tri-Ace's craft even after the release of *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*. While the team has done massive amounts of evolving to put its games on equal footing with cinematic RPGs like *Final Fantasy X* and *Xenosaga*, some serious flaws mar *Star Ocean*.

Fortunately, the story—which unfolds through a mix of well-directed real-time and video cut-scenes—is not one of them. In *Star Ocean's* *Star*

Trek-influenced far-future universe, technologies such as warp drive are commonplace. When alien battleships attack the planet that hero Fayt is vacationing on, he escapes to a backward medieval world called Elicoor II.

Though the game's beginning has sci-fi flair, the vast majority of the action takes place on Elicoor II. Contrary to expectations, *Star Ocean* more closely resembles traditional fantasy RPGs, but it does a good job with the staples of the genre, sprinkling the story with sci-fi to keep things moving. It works well.

Where the game falters is with its battle system. While the action-based

battles sound exciting, there are too many nagging flaws. Targeting enemies is difficult. Worse, you can't hit them when they're down. Your team's A.I. is also far too limited.

Ultimately, *Till the End of Time* is a truly attractive game that sometimes even manages to better its competition, but the gameplay is just too riddled with holes for comfort. **B+**

—Christian Nutt

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN *STAR OCEAN 2* (PS1)
NOT AS GOOD AS *VALKYRIE PROFILE* (PS1)
WAIT FOR IT: DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA

2ND OPINION

I agree that the battle and invention system could use a reif bit of work. I liked the story, though. Yeah, it's boring when you're stuck on the medieval planet, but once you get off it, the story becomes a whole lot cooler by getting into technological territory. And I give it props for that. **B+**
—Thierry Nguyen
PREVIOUS EDITION: OPTM

PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: TRI-ACE
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: JANUET
PLAYERS: 1-2
ORIGIN: JAPAN

COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS

WHEN THE TROOPS GO MARCHING IN

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | X

Given the popularity of WWII as a backdrop for first-person shooting, it was only a matter of time before we started seeing the battle spill into other genres. While we're still waiting for the inevitable dancing game, we do have *Combat Elite*.

First off, it's a top-down shooter, which is a rarity these days. Taking the view away from behind the eyes and to high above gives the familiar WWII trappings an almost retro vibe, the way war games used to be.

You choose from three characters and must traverse numerous (great-looking!) levels that span several real-life campaigns. But instead of straightforward running and shooting, you have to play it smart and take advantage of cover when it's available, as well as provide it for fellow soldiers.

At the end of each mission, you're awarded points to help build up your

character's attributes. In that sense, the game becomes an action-RPG of sorts. The analogy is not too odd when you consider the game uses the same engine that runs *Dark Alliance* and *Champions of Norrath*.

Controls are decent in concept but poor in execution; to bring up the targeting reticule, you have to gently press the fire button, but most gamers will know that the PS2's buttons, analog or not, have very little give, making proper aiming a chore. Also, expect plenty of cheap shots from offscreen enemies. Though you can tell where they're coming from, it's sometimes nearly impossible to work your way toward that area.

But despite the flaws, *Combat Elite* is a decent action game that tries to do something different by combining things that, while familiar, still work. **C-**
—Matthew Hawkins



THE NEED DEV. BATESON INC. (DC) REL. AVAILABLE NOW	PRICE \$29.99 PLAYERS 1-2 ORIGIN U.S.A.
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THE BOOK PART 6/10

BETTER THAN ANY ARMY MAN TITLE
REMEMBER: KILL WARRIORS!
WAIT FOR IT. NEED CONTRA



PUYO POP FEVER

TAKE NONE AND CALL US NEVER

EVERYONE | GC

Puyo Pop Fever is a game whose time has come. And gone. *Puyo Pop*, having started life many years ago in the days of Genesis, is still fun in the same way that the old granddaddy of block-dropping games, *Tetris*, is still fun—but among the current generation of console games, *Fever* feels like some shareware game you could download for free on a PC.

The game's concept is simple: Match colored blobs (aka puyo) into groups of four to make them disappear. As you do, colorless blobs called nuisance puyo are sent to your human or A.I. opponent, which disrupts his or her own chaining process. In order to send massive amounts of nuisance puyo and fill up your opponent's play area, you've got to plan ahead and form many chains at once.

When you're successfully able to continue your game despite an onslaught of nuisance puyo, you fill up a fever meter and can eventually enter fever mode, which has combos already set up for you. If you successfully place the falling puyo, you can easily defeat your opponent.

But other than the resulting flashy background, *Fever* doesn't have a lot of bells and whistles. The graphics are exceedingly simple, featuring mostly static, flat 2D character sprites. For single players, Sonic Team has added a nonsensical story mode, bringing increasingly difficult opponents for you to face off against, but this is pretty brief. You can also play endless traditional *Puyo Pop*, endless fever mode, and a mission mode where you have to complete commands instead of mindlessly chaining puyo.

Despite these options and the definitely addictive act of chaining colored blobs ad infinitum, though, *Fever's* appeal is cooling off. **C-**
—Carrie Shepherd

THE NEED DEV. SONIC TEAM REL. AVAILABLE NOW	PRICE \$29.99 PLAYERS 1-2 ORIGIN JAPAN
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THE BOOK PART 5/10

BETTER THAN PUYO POP ON N-GAME
FEELS LIKE A RIP-OFF
WHY NOT BUY A GENESIS PLUS 2 GREAT GAMES

AMAZING ISLAND

TITULAR FALSE ADVERTISING

EVERYONE | GC

Underlying *Amazing Island* is a very cool concept: the ability to create your own monsters and use them to compete in minigames. While the monster creation is excellent, the minigames feel more rudimentary.

In fact, the monster-creation part of the game—and not the gameplay—is the best part of *Amazing Island*. As you play, you unlock frames (ranging from bunny to scorpion worm), drawing tools, skins, appendages, and tons of accessories—from umbrellas and ponytails to fangs to useful stuff like fins, wings, and even guns—to use on your beast du jour. Not only is the monster customization extremely robust, accessories can also affect the monster's performance. However, there's no way to figure out how except by trying them out.

The games the beast must endure, though, aren't quite masterpieces. Throughout the written-in-five-minutes story, you travel to different places and play minigames that fall somewhere between MarioWare and those old

track-and-field games (i.e., lots of button-mashing). Some of the games are really fun, like a rock-skipping game in which you skip your monster, and some are less fun, like a gem-collecting race that feels suspiciously like a bonus level from a Sonic game. Worse, the same games keep cropping up with slightly different trimmings.

Another frustrating aspect is that there are a ton of dialog boxes to go through for a less-than-satisfying story. Every time you enter an event area, you're asked if you want the rules explained to you again. It just takes so long to get to the events that you can get easily frustrated before you're ever playing the game. The minigames definitely lack the get-in-and-play feel of MarioWare, and it feels like more time is spent on interface screens than gameplay.

Amazing Island definitely plays off the popular and addictive concept of building up the perfect fighting entity to win battles. If only the battles themselves were more fun, this would be a tour de force. **B+**

—Carrie Shepherd



100 SETA	PRICE \$29.99
101 SGA	PLAYERS 1
102 AVAILABLE NOW	GOOD 1 JANU

GMR 6¹⁰

REMINISCENT OF MARIO PANGLOSS,
BEST FOR: LUDICIOUS ARTIST-GAMERS
WAIT FOR IT: PRODIGY FOR DS



RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

THE TERROR WAR CONTINUES

MATURE | XB

Every armchair commando knows that Tom Clancy games aren't just renowned for their gritty realism and one-hit-kill firefights—they're also synonymous with mission over packs that give you pretty much the same bang...for more bucks.

Identical to those of its predecessor, *Black Arrow's* sublime first-person controls and tactile response emulate the impact and power of a firearm, while the game's easy-to-use squad control system remains accessible even for those who never exploit the game's tactical potential. Commanding your three squadmates to clear rooms, secure hostages, and take strategic cover is a simple matter of pushing a contextual button for by simply saying the desired command into a connected headset. In other words, on a purely technical level, the game is a top-notch shooter with near-perfect controls.

Unfortunately, like its prequel, *Black Arrow's* single-player campaign is still a collection of trial-and-error missions that require you to memorize the location of every hostage and enemy

while perfecting your run through linear levels. The improved A.I. touted by the game's developer is sort of misleading; yes, enemies are now more mobile, aggressive, and dynamic. But none of this combat behavior happens on the fly, since most every action is pre-scripted, making the single-player game predictable and repetitive—especially if you've already had your fill of last year's *Rainbow Six 3* on Xbox.

Of course, for fans of the series, the single-player campaign is just a primer for the real reason to play *Black Arrow*: online multiplayer over Xbox Live. Two new additive online game modes (most notably the total conquest mode) and a handful of well-designed maps will undoubtedly continue *Rainbow Six 3's* cyberspace dominance for months to come, challenged only by Ubisoft's other gem, *Pandora Tomorrow*. As nothing more than a mission add-on pack, *Black Arrow* has the goods for any Clancy addict. But you'll have to ask yourself, do you really want to pay full-price for *Rainbow Six 3.5*? **B+**

—Che Chau



100 WIDE	PRICE \$49.99
101 BUSTY	PLAYERS 1-4 (ONLINE)
102 AVAILABLE NOW	ORDER USA

GMR 7¹⁰

BETTER THAN SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY
NOT AS GOOD AS A TRUE RAINBOW SIX SEQUEL
WAIT FOR IT: GHOST RECON 2

ECHO NIGHT: BEYOND

NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SNORE

TEEN | PS2

➔ *Echo Night: Beyond*, the newest of Agetec's successful franchise, tells the tale of Richard Osmond, a man stranded on a lunar space station after his shuttle crashes into it. He awakens to find himself the only person alive, but he's not alone: Ghosts have overrun the station, and his fiancée has gone missing.

Unlike most survival-horror titles, *Echo Night: Beyond* features no weaponry or combat. Exorcising a spirit is a two-step process: Players must activate ventilation systems to clear out a mysterious fog that makes the peaceful spirits malevolent. Then players must deliver to them a trinket from their past lives—an amulet, a stuffed animal, or a can opener—which binds them to the station. Death results when fear drives the player's heart rate to 300 beats per minute, but sedatives can be found in logical places, like potted plants. While the title has a spooky atmosphere and some very real scares, poor pacing and frustrating puzzles undermine the game.

Object interaction zones are tiny, and more than a few players will think they have failed to solve a puzzle

because their character is not perfectly positioned when they attempt to use an item. Puzzles are arbitrary and scattered—one features a piece of chocolate hidden behind a chair that gives the player no indication whatsoever that it can be manipulated.

Unlike *Resident Evil* or *Silent Hill*, each of which tells an intriguing story, *Echo Night: Beyond* gives almost the entire plot away in the opening cinematic, giving players very little reason to carry on. Had Agetec dropped the player in the game with no clue as to what had happened, solving the mystery of the lunar station would have been far more compelling. Characters are one-dimensional—providing ghosts with their mementos causes them to utter a few lines about their past lives, after which they merely vanish.

Gamers who are interested in a horror title without needing to scrounge for ammunition and health packs should give *Echo Night: Beyond* a go, but players who are used to fighting for their survival will find the game dull and repetitive. **C-**

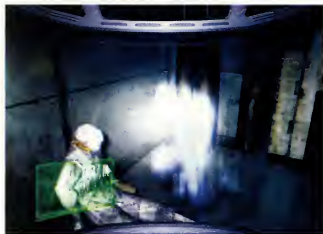
—Doug Trueman



AGE: MISC	TYPE: SURV
DEV: FROM SOFTWARE	PUBLISHED: S
EST. AVAILABLE NOW	REGION: JAPAN

GMR SEVENTH SENSE **S/10**

BETTER THAN: COUNTING SHEEP
NOT AS GOOD AS: FASAL FRAME 2, DIMENSION BUTTERFLY
WAIT FOR IT: RESIDENT EVIL 4



HAMTARO: HAM-HAM GAMES

FLUFFY, YET FUN

EVERYONE | GBA

➔ If the thought of dressing cute anthropomorphic hamsters in adorable costumes makes you squeal with delight, you'll find plenty to love in *Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Games*. But even if the image of the precious Hamtaro in an apple suit makes you cringe, there's a solid game behind the cuteness.

The theme is a sort of hamster Summer Olympics, with events ranging from swimming, diving, and volleyball to carrot putting and bird-back riding. Though they all rely on good timing, Alphadream did a remarkable job of making the events feel different: for archery, you must quickly adjust a moving target on the board and press A when it's centered; for the marathon, you press A to the beat of the music; and for the sailboat race, you use the D-pad to steer to the correct buoys.

Play is perfectly tailored for beginning gamers (more advanced players can adjust the difficulty to Hard). You can read a brief tutorial and practice an event as many times as you want before entering a tournament. What really makes *Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Games* perfect for newbies, though, is that you automatically move on to the next event, even if you came in dead last, so you never get stuck in the game. Between events, you can talk to other characters, hunt for sunflower seeds, and purchase costumes from the Ham shopping network.

Once you've competed through the

whole seven days of tournament mode, which happens quickly if you don't practice a lot, you open up a free-play mode that allows you to play any event at any time to try to get the best score. You can also play through more tournaments; the experience doesn't change dramatically, but there is a fair bit of stuff to explore. If you link up with other *Ham-Ham Games* players, you can also collect player cards that include stats.

Essentially, *Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Games* is a bunch of well-executed minigames wrapped in a cute, furry package. Though the experience feels a tad light, it should earn a gold medal from Hamtaro fans. **A-**

—Carrie Shepherd

AGE: MISC	TYPE: SURV
DEV: ALPHADREAM CORP	PUBLISHED: S
EST. AVAILABLE NOW	REGION: JAPAN

GMR SEVENTH SENSE **7/10**

BETTER THAN: HELLO KITTY WEARING A BEE SUIT
WAIT FOR IT: ANIMAL CROSSING 05

TODD MCFARLANE'S EVIL PROPHECY

MATURE | PS2

➔ A thought-provoking title, *McFarlane's Evil Prophecy* raises some interesting questions, such as: Is this really a game? And also: No, seriously, is this really a game?

The answer is, frankly, either maybe or no, and it really doesn't matter anyway. Something this bad defies description; *Prophecy* serves only as a cautionary tale. To the point: Atari buried the wrong game when it unceremoniously dumped thousands of unsold copies of *E.T.* for the Atari 2600 in a New Mexico landfill. If the company had any foresight, it would have built a time machine in the 1980s, gone forward to 2004, snatched all the copies of Konami's *Prophecy*, and really done mankind a service.

So, in a time of great evil, brainiac nerdlinger Dr. Hans Jaeger assembles a team of geeks including a peg-legged pirate and an African shaman to defeat a monster invasion. Hideous and

sometimes offensive character design ensures that the pirate's shoulders are bigger than his head and that the African warrior comes duded up like a spear-throwing savage from a 1930s Hollywood film.

Never mind *Prophecy*'s nonsensical plot and instead marvel at its liberal, lay comprehensive, use of the color gray. Savor comic book artist Todd McFarlane's edgy "take" on classic monsters such as the werewolf, who now sports metal blades sticking out of his back and a much-needed second werewolf head sprouting from his shoulder. Finally, bask in this simplified beat-em-up's three-button combo system, which enables the character to glide to a mindless victory by tapping X, X, X on the PlayStation controller until the game is won—or, more likely, until death seems like a welcome release. **A-**

—Greg Orlando



100 KONAMI	PRICE: \$29.99
100 KONAMI	PLAYERS: 1-4
100 KONAMI	GENRE: USA

GMR 2 NEW LINE

BETTER THAN AS IF!
WORSE THAN ALMOST EVERY GAME EVER MADE
WAIT FOR IT: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II



STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

SHORYUKEN!

TEEN | PS2

➔ To be perfectly clear: This is the best 2D fighting game ever made. Or rather, games. This slick little package sports an all-inclusive anniversary edition of *Street Fighter II*, along with *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, the pinnacle of 2D fighters. Aside from one minor irritation, this collection is a 2D fighter fan's dream come true.

Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition seamlessly fuses together every iteration of the classic game, from the 13-year-old original to *Super SF2 Turbo*. Every version of the cast is here, and you can mix and match them to your heart's content. Classic, broken original Guile versus Akuma? No problem. *Champion Edition* redid god Bison versus the pitiful T. Hawk? You got it. Then there's *Street Fighter III*. This is a port of the excellent Dreamcast version, with everything conveniently

unlocked right from the get-go. *SF3* introduces a number of new concepts and refines every element of its predecessor to near perfection, combining a solid engine, striking visuals, and an aptly "street" soundtrack to deliver the greatest 2D fighting experience ever.

The only conceivable gripe here is the lack of online play. But with an Xbox Live version coming later, we'll soon be in 2D fighter heaven. **A-**

—Ryan Scott

PER GAMER	PRICE: \$29.99
PER GAMER	PLAYERS: 1-2
PER GAMER	GENRE: JAPAN

GMR 8 BLINDQUEST

BETTER THAN EVERY OTHER 2D FIGHTING GAME EVER
WHERE THE HELL IS THE ONLINE SUPPORT?
WAIT FOR IT: THE XBOX LIVE VERSION



→ Like in Studio Cambridge's last effort, *Primal*, players get to control a second character every so often. This time it's a helpful spirit named Astral, who's more versatile than *Primal*'s lumbering gargoyle Scree. She also looks better in a wispy toga.



→ *Ghosthunter* features a wide variety of spooks to catch. One minute you'll be trading shots with comical entities right out of *The Real Ghostbusters*, and the next you'll be plunging the depths of a mansion haunted by giant dead babies and the lovely lady in the rocking chair. You've been warned.



GHOSTHUNTER

NOT FOR THE CABELA'S CROWD

RATING PENDING | PS2

→ Hey, Studio Cambridge! The *Ghostbusters* called, and they want their schtick back. Seeing as it's filled with futuristic ghost-hunting gadgets and monstrous haunts that straddle a line between creepy and silly, it's hard not to compare *Ghosthunter* to a certain iconic '80s movie. But with its unique twist on survival-horror and superb production values, the game has an unlife all its own.

At first blush, the game looks like any other third-person shooter. As Jones explores the game's rather linear environments, he'll use his firearms and energy weapons to send a wide assortment of ghosts packing. But although its only real combat innovation

is the Frisbee/traplike "grenade," which can be used to stun and eventually capture ghosts, *Ghosthunter* manages to stay fun and addictive throughout.

This is largely thanks to the increasingly devious puzzles and fetch quests that Jones faces as the game unfolds, which nicely break up the combat and only occasionally disrupt the game's flow. There are also spots where Jones cedes control to Astral, a friendly (and shapely) spirit who can float to inaccessible areas and use powers stolen from other ghosts.

But the real selling point is *Ghosthunter*'s presentation, and the graphics, script, music, and acting are all first-rate. The game's atmosphere,

which veers from goofy to deeply disturbing and back again, is pretty unique and features some truly bizarre and creative touches along the way.

As a fun, relatively lighthearted action-horror romp, *Ghosthunter* might not impress gamers weaned on *Silent Hill*. But for anyone who's ever dreamed of strapping on a proton pack and busting ghosts, look no further. **A-**

—Mikel Reparaz

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN PRIMAL
NOT AS GOOD AS EXTERNAL DARKNESS
WAIT FOR IT: RESIDENT EVIL 4

2ND OPINION

For someone whose easily frightened mind might not be ready for the likes of *Silent Hill* and *Fatal Frame*, I round *Ghosthunter* to be an amusing alternative. It's not *Lugia* monster light, but it's no blood running down the walls, voices in the back of your head, and disembodied bloody bunny heads, either. **B+**

—Andrew Plister

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FOOTBALL

THE GRIDIRON GREAT YEAR BY YEAR

APPLE II/GENESIS/SNES/3DO/PS1/SATURN/N64/PS2/GB/GBA | 1989-2003



➔ Whether you consider pigskin your second skin or you think pass interference is when one of your buddies interrupts you as you're trying to get your mack on, you're familiar with the Madden games. Since 1989, gamers have known that each annual installment of the series will knock their socks, cleats, and jockstraps off.

To mark the 15th anniversary of the franchise, EA is releasing a special edition of this year's Madden titled *Madden NFL 2005: Collector's Edition*. Included in it are some of the 16- and 32-bit incarnations of the best-selling series. To commemorate this milestone, *GMR* looks back at some of the more memorable moments in Madden's illustrious videogame career.

1989: KICKOFF

➔ The first John Madden Football releases for Apple II. It's also the first 11-on-11 football game, made that way because Madden himself declared, "I will not put my name on it if it's not real."



1992: GO TEAM!

➔ Classic teams make their first appearance in this version, though obviously, without their real names. The no-huddle offense is the big gameplay tweak. The rental-only Championship Edition on Genesis adds even more teams and a battery backup.



1990: 16-BIT SCORES

➔ The series comes to 16-bit consoles, first to Sega's Genesis. Its gameplay is worlds above any other console football game's, and the isometric field lends a 3D look. An SNES version appears shortly after, but it doesn't have quite the same bite, partially due to its development being farmed out to a different company.



1993: LICENSED TO PLAY

➔ Madden finally gets the NFL license, which changes the game's name to *Madden NFL '94*. Explaining why it took so long to get the license, Steve Chiang, general manager of EA Tiburon, says, "Games were considered toys back then, and there was no licensing arm for videogames back then. You had to do a lot of convincing to get a movie or sport to give you their license."



Sixteen-game seasons are implemented and a slew of new features are added. The SNES title is brought in-house and starts catching up to its Genesis counterpart. Due to similarities to the acronym ESPN, EASN—the EA sports brand—changes its name to EA Sports. "EA Sports: It's in the game" becomes a household phrase.

1994: PLAYERS ASSOCIATE

➔ The NFL Players Association gets on board this year, allowing real player names to be featured. Stat tracking takes a step up, and a battery backup is included to save it all. Madden goes to Fox Sports, which lends its theme music. All-time great teams aren't included.



3DO, the 32-bit CD-based multimedia console, gets its only version of Madden. (Trip Hawkins is the founder of both EA and 3DO.) Graphically, it looks light-years better than the other versions.



1991: AHEAD OF ITS TIME

➔ John Madden Football '92—the first time the year on the game's name is ahead of the actual year it ships—introduces instant replays and injuries (accompanied by an on-field ambulance).



1995: ROLL YOUR OWN

➔ Madden NFL '96 lets gamers create their own players; these players run drills to boost their attributes and can be drafted by a team. Season mode now includes player trades and a salary cap. Also of note, PlayStation's Madden is a no-show [see sidebar].



1996: CD GOES LONG

➔ Madden goes to PlayStation and Saturn with high-definition player models and an improved presentation. The CD medium gives the games amazing audio and video, as well as space for more teams and plays. The running game gets revamped, and player fatigue is implemented.



1997: KICKIN' IT POLYGONAL

➔ Nintendo 64 gets its first Madden, which is also the series' first polygonal title. It doesn't have the NFL license, due to an exclusivity agreement between the league and Acclaim's NFL Quarterback Club game. The PlayStation version is still sprite based, unlike its competition, GameDay, which goes polygonal this year.



1998: FRANCHISING

➔ The PlayStation's Madden is finally polygonal. The franchise mode revolutionizes sports games by putting almost every facet of an actual NFL season—in fact, up to 15 consecutive seasons—in the gamer's control. Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo versions of the series are not released for the first time in nearly a decade, drawing a close to Madden's support of the console generation that made the series famous.



1999: 100 YARDS IN 30 FRAMES FLAT

➔ On PlayStation, EA gets Madden to run at 30 frames per second—as fast as the previous sprite-based incarnations. The launching Dreamcast never gets a version of Madden; Visual Concepts' NFL 2K series fills that blank.



2000: BY GEORGE!

➔ It's tough, but EA puts out Madden NFL 2001 for PlayStation 2, revolutionizing the series yet again, especially graphically. Chiang outlines the difficulties, "When we started the project, we didn't have any dev kits. Later, we had one system for 10, 15 people." The popular Madden cards make their first appearance, and Tennessee Titans running back Eddie George is the first person to grace the game's cover who isn't named John Madden.



MADDEN = MONTANA

TRIP HAWKINS AND THE BIG SWITCH

➔ EA and 3DO founder Trip Hawkins is generally known as a shrewd businessman, but he may have pulled his most amazing feat in the gaming industry in 1990. While working on the first Madden for Sega Genesis, Sega approached Hawkins with a problem. The company was working on Joe Montana Football, but development wasn't going as well as hoped. So, Sega asked Hawkins to abandon Madden and shift all the work to date to Joe Montana.

Rather than scrap Madden in favor of Sega's Montana, Hawkins made a counterproposal: He and his team would use Madden's technology, tweak it a bunch, and make the resulting game different enough so that Sega could sell it as Joe Montana and still allow EA to release Madden. Sega agreed.

In actuality, much of what made Madden great was scaled down for Montana, though Sega still got a pretty good game out of the deal. Both titles were in the top five for sales that year, and few people ever knew they were basically developed by the same people.



2001: GC, XBOX GET GAME

GameCube and Xbox get versions of *Madden NFL 2002*. The graphics receive an upgrade in animation, body shapes, expressions, and nonplayer models like refs and coaches. The PS1 and N64 *Madden* get Madden classic—a throwback to the 16-bit look and feel of the series but with current rosters and players.



2002: STARTING ONLINE-UP

PlayStation 2's *Madden NFL 2003* releases with online play. Across the board, 300 player faces are used. EA stops bringing the series to Nintendo 64.



2003: HALL OF FAME

Madden NFL 2004's owner mode puts gamers in charge of just about everything, including which players do what drills, how much the home stadium charges for beer and region-exclusive food, and whether to move the team to Hawaii and call it the Parrotheads. Playmaker control gives gamers more interaction with on-field activity, like guiding blockers and redirecting backs before the snap. The *Madden* series enters the Pro Football Hall of Fame.



MADDEN '96 FOR PS2 THE YEAR THAT NEVER WAS

PlayStation launched in 1995, and EA fully intended to have a *Madden* gracing the system in its inaugural year. However, nothing showed. Steve Chiang, general manager of EA Tiburon, offers this insight: "When you get new hardware, you think you can do everything. In the end, you end up overscoping the project, trying to do too much, and don't get to where you need to be. What happened was the game slipped, and continued to slip, and slipped out of the year. In January, EA made the decision that, rather than release something after the season and maybe not to the quality they wanted to get it to, they killed the product."

Sony's own *NFL GameDay* can definitely take credit for the PlayStation *Madden* delay as well. Explains Chiang: "*GameDay* comes out, you look at their game, and you assess where we're at. Consumers aren't stupid; they know which game's better. Rather than taking a risk of hurting the EA Sports brand, you want to take the year off and go back to the drawing board to really compete."

The college football game EA Tiburon was working on at the time became *Madden '97*. Visual Concepts, which went on to do the competitive *NFL 2K/ESPN NFL* series, was originally developing the PlayStation *Madden '96*. The delay definitely affected the series. Chiang says, "It put us in the hole for a while. We had to fight through the [talk that] *GameDay* is better than *Madden* for many years." But, as we all know, EA recovered.



GET MORE SELL OR TRADE IN YOUR USED

There comes a time in every game's life when it is no longer the most popular game in the house. Perhaps a newer game has arrived. Or maybe, just maybe, the opposite sex has been discovered and some quick cash is needed to spend on flowers or whatever.

The point is, sometimes there's a desire to sell or trade in old games. Problem is, there are a lot of ways to do it, and where you go has an effect on how much cash or store credit you get for your games. Nowadays, there are three good places to unload old games.

VIDEOGAME STORES

The easiest way to unload games is by trading them in at a videogame store (such as Electronics Boutique—Ed.). Most mall-based and privately owned shops let folks trade in games. The retail chains typically give store credit in exchange for games. Keep in mind that if they do offer cash, it is normally less than what you would get in store credit.

The nice parts about trading in games are that it's easy to do (just a quick trip to the local store) and it's instant gratification. Credit or cash is gotten right away to spend on new games or the aforementioned flowers.

Occasionally, retail chains will also run trade-in specials where they offer more than the standard trade-in value (say, an extra \$10 credit for trading in three games at once).

The downside to trading in games is that people are pretty much at the mercy of the store. The store can give as much (or as little) as they want for a game. Prices vary, of course, but unless the game is a current must-have release, chances are, the return isn't going to be nearly what you paid for it.

ONLINE AUCTIONS

For those strictly looking to sell, games (not trade them in, going online is an excellent bet. Sure, it requires a little more work, but in the end, your profit will be higher—especially for rare games. There are several online auction sites, but eBay (www.ebay.com) is the one most familiar to the average Joe.

Be strategic when you sell. In the ideal situation, bidding wars will drive up the price of a game even more than you expected. On the other hand, unless you set a reserve price on your auction (meaning you sell the game only if it reaches a certain dollar amount), your game may end up selling for far less than anticipated.

Of course, once your auction is over, there's the wait for the buyer's check or money order to be mailed, unless a service like PayPal (www.paypal.com) is used, which allows the buyer to automatically transfer money into the seller's account. The game will also have to be sent to the winning bidder, meaning a trip to the post office.

They don't pop up very often, but sellers should be aware that there are dishonest buyers online. Typically, these losers decide they don't want a game after they win the auction, or they may claim that they never received the game and demand a refund. To avoid these troubles, sellers should check the buyer's feedback rating on the auction site beforehand to make sure they have a good reputation, and always get insurance and delivery confirmation on the games you ship.

Sellers should note that online auction sites sometimes require that you have a credit card in order to sell items, and they charge a small fee to place an item up for bid. It's a good idea to read the site's policies for full details before selling anything.

FOR YOUR GAMES

CARTS AND DISCS FOR FUN AND PROFIT

SELLING TIPS


- Before you get rid of any of your games, make sure you know what it is you're getting rid of. Just because you don't play that old copy of *Intelligent Qube* for PS1 doesn't mean that a bunch of collectors aren't willing to pay top dollar for it on eBay.
- Head online and do a little research to find out how much your collection is worth. One handy resource is Digital Press' Online Rarity Guide (www.digitpress.com). Also be sure to look up your games on eBay's completed auctions to see how much they've been fetching there.
- Consider the condition of your games. Retail stores usually don't care about this when you trade in games—as long as the game disc isn't terribly scratched up, the condition of the box and instruction manual (if you even have them) doesn't factor into the amount you get. Online, it's a different story. Online buyers are typically willing to pay more for games in good shape. This goes double for rare games that collectors want to get in mint condition.

HALF.COM

If a game is in good shape, it can sometimes garner near its full retail price on Half.com. Sellers don't have to worry about the buyer flaking out. Half.com charges the buyer's credit card for the amount of the game and then turns around and pays the seller, either by check or a direct deposit into a bank account.

There are no guarantees with Half.com: Sometimes a game is listed for weeks without anyone coming along and buying it. If this happens, the game's price may have to be lowered to make it more enticing to buyers. It can also take a couple weeks to receive payment from Half.com, so if cash needed now, sellers should rethink Half.com.

As with the auction sites, sellers will also have to make a trip to the post office (remember the insurance and delivery confirmation) and pay a small fee to use the site's service.

On a side note, Half.com will be integrating with eBay on October 14. Although both websites will be fused into one, there will be a separate area of eBay called "The Half Zone," where people can sell games much like they currently can on Half.com. 



THE DANGER OF SPORTS GAMES

It's a pretty safe bet that EA will release a new *Madden* game every year until the end of time. Sports games also tend to sell extremely well, so excessive quantities of them are manufactured. Because of this, there will always be a glut of outdated sports games available. This causes the value of sports games to drop almost immediately after they are released. You'll want to keep that in mind as you begin your selling.



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TIPS. CODES. ONLINE. AND MORE

THIS MONTH IN MORE

RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW 103

The toughest missions, in the bag

AI 106

Get the GMR T-shirt in *Karaoke Revolution Volume 2!*

CONNECT 108

City of Heroes turns evil.

GAME GEEZER 110

The old man's having a crappy day



RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

DEADLY DELIVERANCE: SHARPENING YOUR BLACK ARROW TIPS

➔ Special operations getting you down? A particularly troublesome terrorist holed up in a back alley, tagging your crew? Then prepare to gain expert takedown tactics from this exclusive walkthrough of the most difficult missions. Requesting additional recon? Check out Prima's *Official Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow Strategy Guide*.

MISSION 3: BACK ALLEYS

LOCATION: BACK ALLEYS, PAVIA, ITALY

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

Neutralize terrorists
Eliminate general

MISSION BRIEFING:

This is Colonel Shamil Magomedov. He's the reason for your problems. It is people like him who keep you employed.



➔ Colonel Shamil Magomedov has been linked to terrorists responsible for some horrific acts. He was spotted recently in Pavia, where he tried to kidnap a telemetry scientist. Fortunately, the scientist got away, and the police responded quickly, barricading off the area. This left the terrorists, still inside, with some heavy firepower. You need to get in there and hit them quickly before they have time to set up further. Don't worry about shooting first and asking questions later, because you won't be taking any prisoners. You'll be fighting in crowded conditions with lots of obstructions in your way, so stay alert and be patient. Good luck!

GO TIME!

From your insertion point, follow the alley straight and then go through the archway on the left. Creep through the archway and bring up your scope. Aim to the left and ease your way out. In the distance, you can snipe a terrorist waiting to blast you from behind a dumpster. Put him down, but keep your scope up. Another bad guy comes to investigate from the left. Put a bullet in him as well.

Progress with your men toward the dead body near the dumpster. Keep your gun ready for any fools who might try to shoot you as you get close. At the end of the next alleyway is a guy on his knees, ready to surrender. Unfortunately, an unknown attacker lights him on fire as you close in. At least you know there is trouble around the corner. Get your scope



→ These tight alleyways can be dangerous places. Good thing you have friends...trends who carry automatic weapons!



→ Use your scope to take out enemies in the distance. That terrorist only looks like he's sleeping near the dumpster.

up as you move in and drop the perp when he shows his face.

Ease down the next long alley and around corners until you can put a bullet in the back of an enemy's head in the distance. He has friends with him in the area, so get ready. One might run off down the next alley, but the other is just waiting to die. Send your squad to the corner of the next alley and have them shoot anything that moves while you move in behind them for support. Keep your scope up and take out the terrorist on the balcony, if he's still alive.

Approach the balcony and look down the alley to the left. Notice the window with the fluttering red curtains in the distance? Keep your reticle trained on that spot until a gunman appears. Once he's down, you can point your gun to the right, where the walkway leads. Another terrorist will try to gas you, so put a bullet in him before he gets the chance. Send your men down the walkway to clean up any terrorists



→ Be aware of your surroundings. You never know when an enemy will try to snipe you from a distance.

still in the area. As you back them up, look to the balconies around the area for snipers.

Open the door nearby and lead your men into the enemy-free room beyond. You have only one way to go, and that's through the only door you can open. Bring your men into the blocked hallway past the door—that way, they're close if you need them.

Crouch and open the door. Train your gun to the right, where you can pop a guard on patrol, then drop the guard who decides to rush you. Send in your squad to set up a position on the ramp across from the door. Walk to the right and look left down a long hall at the end of the room. The guard with his back turned at the end of the alley makes an easy target. Now return to your guys waiting on the ramp.

Make your way up the series of ramps until you get to an open doorway. Peek your head in and quickly take out the terrorist to the left of the door, but don't enter the next room. There are lots of enemies on the floor below who are waiting to take you down. From the safety of the hall, turn on your thermal vision and bring up your scope. Crouch and slowly ease into the next room. Keep your scope aimed at the bottom floor through the railing. Shoot all the warm bodies you find.



→ The terrorists hiding in the darkness below are easy targets with your thermal vision.

When the room below is clear, you and your men can move along the walkway and out the next door. You emerge on a long, wide alley. Set your men up behind some cover while you walk down the alley. Point your gun around the left corner. Shoot the terrorist [who tries to set you on fire] on



→ Terrorists swarm at the end of the alley to stop you. Keep your distance and take them down one by one.

the balcony. Many enemies appear at the end of the alley and start shooting at you, so quickly retreat to some cover. Use your friends to take them out.

After the men at the end of the alley are killed, return to the corner where you dropped the guy on the balcony. Two more enemies, both of whom you can dispose of, are there. After you kill them, continue down the long alley. Enter the slightly ajar door on the left and pop the enemy hiding there. Return to the long alleyway one more time and make your way to the next corner on the right.

Lots of enemies are posted around the corner. Ease around the corner and shoot the first person you see. Most of the terrorists will be on the same floor as you, but there will be snipers on the roof in the distance. Peek out and check both places and shoot anybody you see. Make sure you stick close to the wall and duck behind it after you make each kill to avoid getting shot.



→ Enemies on the roof can make you suffer if you don't take them out.

When it looks like the coast is clear, make your way into the next area and down the ramp to the left. Follow the hallway to the first corner on the right and bring up your scope. Shoot the guard on the balcony in the distance. Move in further and shoot the terrorists you find in the next area.

When the coast is clear, head to the door on the left. Open the door, but don't rush in, because you might get shot. Bring up your scope, peek into the room, and blast the gunman on the other side of the room. If the room gets smoky, switch to thermal vision so that you can see him. His death brings an end to the mission.

MISSION 4: STREETS OF MILAN

LOCATION: CITY STREETS, MILAN, ITALY

MISSION OBJECTIVES:

Eliminate terrorists
Free hostages

MISSION BRIEFING:

The plan to transport the terrorists didn't go so well. Emergency vehicles litter the streets.



→ The convoy taking the captured terrorists from the last operation was ambushed this morning. It seems Colonel Magomedov has more friends...friends who carefully planned the rescue mission. They used a vehicle to block the convoy while they extracted their comrades. The police at the scene were outmatched, but they were able to call in reinforcements to seal the terrorists in the city center. Unfortunately, the terrorists took some hostages and rigged some barricades with explosives, so be careful. The area is urban, with lots of balconies and rooftops for snipers to hide on. Keep your eyes on the ground, as well as to the sky. Don't let those terrorists get the drop on you. Good luck!

GO TIME!

From your starting location, approach the first corner on your right and bring up your scope. High above the city streets, standing in front of a glowing sign, is the first sniper for you to drop. Walk down the road with your squad and shoot the opposition further down the road in the distance. Don't go too far around the corner near the white van, because a sniper is waiting on the balcony. Peek around the corner with your scope up to take him out.

Send your men to the back of the white van, where they can take out more opposition in the area, including snipers on the roof. If a terrorist smokes out the area, switch to thermal vision to see your targets. Advance further down the road and shoot the sniper on the roof to the left of the fire truck.

Advance with your men down the road. Use the broken-down vehicles in the road as cover. Send your men to cover the corner past the fire engine—follow with your scope aimed at the window to the right and hit the sniper who appears there. With the window sniper out of the way, advance down the



→ Watch the balconies high above the city streets for snipers who are looking to put a bullet in your head

street, keeping close to the walls and behind cars. Use your scope to pop enemies in the distance as you advance. Be sure to position your men behind vehicles to get them some cover from enemy fire.

After you make your way past the red trolley car, a swarm of terrorists appears behind a blockade down the street. Duck into the small alcove to the left of the trolley. Pop your head out with your scope up and take out the enemies one by one while avoiding bullets and rockets. Keep your eyes out for enemies who try to rush your position. After a while, a bomb near the barricade goes off, creating a fiery explosion.

With the coast clear, walk backward to the barricade. Another sniper appears in the window



→ Don't get too close to the barricade, because the crazy terrorists will blow it up.

above the street and tries to shoot your men in the back. With the sniper dead, head down the alley to the left of the barricade. Follow the enemy-free alleyway until you get to a locked door. Go through the door, down the ramp, and into the next room. Move through the next door.

Before you progress down the next hall, shoot the terrorist guarding the door ahead. Advance with your men over the dead guard and open the door next to him. Use your thermal vision and drop the guards you find. Instead of going through the room, return to the alley you just came from and continue forward. As you approach the corner to the right, get your gun ready. Ease around the corner and kill the terrorists before they get any shots off. If they use smoke to blind you, switch to your thermal vision to spot their heat.



→ Thermal vision will help you spot the terrorists in the dark and crowded supply room.

With the area clear, progress with your men down the next alleyway and through the large gray door. The next courtyard is clear, so move through the next door straight ahead. Open the door to the restaurant to find a hostage, along with some heavily armed terrorists. Use the wall near the door as cover, drop the two enemies in the room, then send in your men to secure the hostage. Exit the restaurant and make your way down the next long alley.

Move to the corner of the alley on the right and take out the terrorists at the end. Open the door nearby and shoot the gunman. Move through the room and open the next door, where you need to



→ There's the second hostage in the garage, as well as a heavily armed terrorist.

kill an enemy to the right of the door. Move through that room until you look into a garage and find a second hostage and more terrorists. Drop the bad guys you see, then send in your men to mop up the rest. When it is all clear, have your men secure the hostage.

Leave the garage and follow the road to the right. Follow the path up the stairs and down the alley until you get to another restaurant entrance. Open the door and take out any resistance inside. Creep inside with your gun aimed at the tops of the buildings to the left. Terrorists appear there and try to snipe you. After they're all killed, you can make your way through the place and out the back door.



→ When the terrain gets cluttered with debris or scaffolding, it can be hard to see terrorists. Send in your men to flush them out.

With the next courtyard clear, go through the door on the right. Follow the bright alley to a courtyard with scaffolding. Use your men to take out the snipers to the left. Continue forward, up some stairs, and to the entrance to another courtyard. Snipe the enemies you find in the distance to the right. Move into the room and send your men forward to take out any enemies hiding behind the statue.

When that area is clear, continue down the small hallway you find. It leads you to a very large courtyard and more terrorists. Snipe them from a distance to put them down quickly. When the enemies have been cleared, move to the back of the area, where you'll find a large hole in the ground. Climb down to end the mission. **14**



→ The large statue blocks your sight of more naughty terrorists who want to kill you.



A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL. BUT HE IS NOT



>>>BOOT UP PROGRAM INITIATED

>>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #1>> Serve the public trusts.

>>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #2>> Uphold the law that all bosses have weak flashing points to fire at.

>>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #3>> Protect the innocent from surplus big-head codes.

>>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #4>>[[CLASSIFIED]]

REBOOTING...

>>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #5>>Connect to Prima mother brain and begin code download.

>>>ONLINE

>>>CODE_OVERLOAD_ALERT!

01 RIVER CITY RANSOM OBA

➔ A.I. Bot has successfully connected to Nintendo's central computer. Homing in on Codes database. Entering area marked "Repackaging NES games ad infinitum." Connected to River City Ransom code stream—commence code input at the Status screen in the Name Change area:

Clear save data	ERAZE
Get \$999,999.99	PLAYA
Max stats	DAMAX
Custom character	XTRA0
Custom move	XTRA2
Custom self	XTRA1
Obtain boomerang, charge it, bat bang, flying kick, speed drop, bomb blow, killer kick, bike kick, slam punk, dragon knee, god fist, hyper guard	WAZZA
Obtain mach punch, dragon kick, acro circus, grand slam, javelin man, slick trick, nitro port, twin kick, deadly shot, top spin, helicopter, and terpedo	FUZZY
Obtain slap happy, pulper, head butt, kickstand, big bang, wheel throw, glide chop, head bomb, chain kick, jet kick, shuriken, and flip throw	WUZZY
Obtain phoenix wing, intines, springlines, rocketeers, air merc's, narci shoes, magic pants, Pandora box, skaterz, and custom fit	BEAR



02 KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOLUME 2 PSE

➔ By combining database elements of all available sound effects, A.I. Bot can synthesize any warbling from a current flesh-bag pop sensation. While A.I. Bot finishes synthesis, input codes at the main Title screen to get special T-shirts.

GMR (Aneeka)	Right, Left, R3, Left, Up, Up, L3, Down, Circle, Square
Harmonix (Ishani)	L3, Circle, Up, Circle, Square, L3, Down, Down, R3
Konami (Dwayne)	Right, R3, Right, R3, Square, Right, Circle, Square, Down, Left



03 VAN HELSING OBA

➔ A.I. Bot's popular-culture monitor has informed him that the special effects seen in this tiny cartridge offering are only marginally less realistic than those seen in the movie bearing the same name. Therefore, a level-skip-code imperative has been deemed urgent and appropriate.

Enter these codes at the Password menu.

Traveling by train level	3X9 M12 111
Carriage battle level	9C1 PIW LC1
Escape from castle level	8P5 7DB KC1
On the trail of the werewolf level	65M 5HL 611
St. Peter's Basilica level	255 M12 111
Valken the werewolf level	54! 5DV 411
Vasaria village level	4H0 5DH 311
Dracula's children level	7BQ *24 8C1
Dracula's castle level	BF1 8KF MC1
Dracula final level	CG5 B78 *M1
Ending credits	DL5 BF3 QM1



04 SAMURAI JACK GC

➔ A.I. Bot wants you to "jack" up your offensive power and get a "samu-rise" out of the most impressive picture gallery. Alert! A.I. Bot appears to have contracted a virus known as "gun.CarrotTop.exe." Recommends system diagnosis, defragmentation, and flushing.

Fire sword	Press the control stick up and the C stick down and press A, X, B, Y.
Max zen	Press the control stick left and the C stick right and press X, A, B, Y.
Sketch gallery	Complete the game on Easy difficulty.
Background gallery	Complete the game on Normal difficulty.
Model gallery	Complete the game on Hard difficulty.



05 DRIV3R PS2/XB

➔ AL3RTH! A.I. Bot suff3r3n3 s3r3ous grammatical malfunction. Cannot curr3ntly locat3 virus. Must shut down non3ss3ntial routin3s imm3diat3ly to pr3v3nt n3tural impairm3nt. While3 antivir3s routin3 comm3nc3s, 3nt3r th3s3 1337 cod3s at the Main m3nu: [NOTE: Does not work in story mode!]

All weapons [PS2]	Press R1, L2, Square, Circle, R1, R2, L2.
All weapons [XB]	Press L, L, X, Y, Y, R, R.
All missions [PS2]	Press L1, R1, L1, L2, Square, Square, Circle.
All missions [XB]	Press X, Y, L, R, L, R, R.
All vehicles [PS2]	Press L1, L1, Square, Circle, L1, R1, Circle.
All vehicles [XB]	Press X, X, Y, Y, R, R, L.
Invincibility [PS2]	Press Square, Square, L1, R1, L2, R2, R2.
Invincibility [XB]	Press X, X, Y, Y, L, R, L.



06 SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY PS2

➔ A.I. Bot has an interesting fact for flesh bags currently utilizing ocular circuitry: 67.65 percent of A.I. Bot's nuclear core is powered by red mercury, prompting Program>>Launch>>Joke_routine: "A.I. Bot: better red than dead!"

A.I. Bot notes puzzlement. Suggests young flesh bag reconvene with senior flesh bag for detailed assimilation of mid-20th-century Cold War jingoistic slogans...only after entering these codes at the password screen.

All co-op levels	wanderlust
All single-player missions	happy camper



07 PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY PS2/XB

➔ A.I. Bot has solved humankind's conspiracy theories and will explain them, beginning with the shooting of President John F. Kennedy. Sonic resonance from the grassy knoll has indicated... <-BZZZT!-> Powering down... In the menu, go down to Extra Content and press the R1 button [PS2] or the R trigger [XB] and enter any of these codes for extra play models.

Edgar Barrett	497878	Nick Stryker (Urban)	484646
Jov Leonov	468987	Nick Stryker (Wasteland)	975466
Kimiko Jones	978788	Sara Blake	135488
Lab coat	998789	Sara Blake (Pai)	468799
Marlena Kessler	489788	Sara Blake (Suicide)	231444
Marlena Kessler (Bikini)	135454	Scorpion	546566
Marlena Kessler (Leather)	136876	Tonya	678999
Marlena Kessler (Sarbanes)	65496873	UN Soldier	345498
MP1	321644	Wei Lu	231324
Nick Stryker (Stealth)	456498	Wei Lu (Dragon)	978789
Nick Stryker (Training)	564689	Wei Lu (Tranquility)	654854

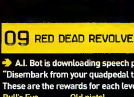


08 FAR CRY PS2

➔ A.I. Bot emulates crying 16.7 percent more frequently than other artificial life forms. However, A.I. Bot hides emotion subroutines far away on the inside.

At the Main menu or anytime during the game, press the Tilde key and enter any of these level-select codes.

Archive level	vmap archive	Pier level	vmap pier
Boat level	vmap boat	Rebellion level	vmap rebellion
Bunker level	vmap bunker	Regulator level	vmap regulator
Carrier level	vmap carrier	Research level	vmap research
Catacombs level	vmap catacombs	River level	vmap river
Control level	vmap control	Steam level	vmap steam
Cooler level	vmap cooler	Swamp level	vmap swamp
Dam level	vmap dam	Training level	vmap training
Factory level	vmap factory	Treehouse level	vmap treehouse
Fort level	vmap fort	Volcano level	vmap volcano



09 RED DEAD REVOLVER PS2

➔ A.I. Bot is downloading speech patterns of a great American Western folk hero. Begin: John>Wayne>routine: "Disembark from your quadpedal travelling companion and digest bovine by-products, pilgrim."

These are the rewards for each level. The first is for a Good rating, and the second is for an Excellent rating.

Bull's Eye	Old pistol	Broken Creek level
Bounty Hunter	"Bloody" Tom	"Big Girl" Whitney
Ugly Streetlight	"Ugly" Chris	Freak Show level
Railroaded	Owl rifle	Rico Pedrosa
Carnival Life	Focus (Dead-Eye) max-up	"Pig" Josh
Freak Show	Health max-up	Breach loader
Rogue Valley	Cooper	Bad Bessie
Cemetery	Ghost Town level	Mr. Black
Range War	The Ranch level	Holstein Hal
Saloon Fight	Dan	Sam
The Traitor	The Bridge level	Health max-up
Sunset Canyon	Twin revolvers	Focus (Dead-Eye) max-up
Bear Mountain	Shadow Wolf	Focus (Dead-Eye) max-up
The Mine	The Mine level	"Smiley" Fawler
Hell Pass	Buffalo	Gabriel Navarro
Fort Diego	Health max-up	Colonel Daren
Devils & Angels	The Ranch level	General Diego
Battle Finale	Focus (Dead-Eye) max-up	Mr. Kelley
The Siege	Mansion Grounds level	Jason Cornet
Fall From Grace	Weapon - Scorpion revolver	Governor Griffon



CONNECT

CITY OF HEROES WORSHIPPERS GET LUCKY

ONLINE GAMING

TRUE FRIENDS

➔ If online gaming seems like walking alone into a raging party where you don't know a soul, you might just have the wrong friends.

Recently, I've been playing a lot of *City of Heroes*. Now, this game makes it really easy to play with strangers, and I've had plenty of fun times that way. But lately, I've been playing more and more with my real-life friends and coworkers, and it's made it the best online gaming experience I've had in years. When you know people in real life, it's that much easier to have good relationships with them in-game. On a tough mission, your friends will help out and ask nothing in return. If you get stuck in a heated battle, your friends won't ditch you unexpectedly. And if you accidentally let someone die...well, I guess even your friends would be pissed about that, but at least you can laugh about it later. Which brings me to the best part of online gaming with real-life friends: The next day, at work or school, you can all talk about the madness from the night before. It's like being part of a secret society.

Don't get me wrong, random strangers can turn into friends in the long run. But online gaming doesn't have to be a bunch of strangers sitting alone at their computers, connecting with each other using the somewhat creepy magic of cyberspace. The right real-life friends, in fact, can make online gaming into a raging party where you know everybody—and who doesn't love that? ☛

—Jennifer Tsao is the managing editor of EGM.

UP, UP, AND AWAY! CITY OF HEROES GETS AN UPGRADE

NEWS

➔ What's faster than a speeding bullet? More powerful than a locomotive? Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound? Well, it's Superman, of course. But who cares about him when you can create your very own crime-fighting superhero in NCsoft's *City of Heroes*? The massively multiplayer comic superhero RPG launched last April and has already achieved a subscriber base of over 200,000 users. It's also one of the most feature-rich MMOs around and has already been the subject of a massive content update that adds even more options for

dedicated players.

The first major update for *City of Heroes*, titled *Through the Looking Glass*, is a free patch for all subscribers. It introduces a number of new supervillain groups for heroes to fight, including the devilish Carnival of Shadows and the militaristic Malta Group. There's even an incredibly powerful new übermonster, spawned by the alien rikti species, which high-level players can challenge for a chance to earn the most powerful superpower enhancement in the game.

New mission types have been introduced, including instanced outdoor missions, which give superhero groups the opportunity to travel to private outdoor areas in pursuit of their mission objectives. Some missions even take place in alternate dimensions, including a takeoff on *Planet of the Apes* and a bizarre Earth where Germany won the war.

Finally, NPC tailor characters have been added, which allow players to purchase new costumes that they can change on the fly. Additional clothing options—including, according to lead designer Jack Emmert, "a certain type of superhero clothing that players have been eagerly awaiting"—are planned for the game's next update, which should be finished sometime later this year. What have we got to say about that? To quote the Tick, SP000000N! ☛

—Ryan Scott



DOWNLOAD THIS! ➔

Every month, we'll pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

**SILENT STORM:
SENTINELS DEMO**
www.silentstorm-online.de/



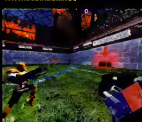
This demo shows off the upcoming expansion to the turn-based tactical-strategy game *Silent Storm*. *Sentinels* will feature an all-new campaign, more mission objectives, and new reliability ratings for your weapons. ☛

KKRIEGER
www.theproduktkt.com/



Yeah, just another shooter—what's the big deal? *kkrieger* only takes up a paltry 96k of disk space and generates all its graphics, sounds, and other elements on the fly. It ain't *Doom 3*, but it's certainly a technical innovation. ☛

DEATHBALL
www.deathball.net/



DeathBall is an award-winning total-conversion mod that turns *Unreal Tournament 2003* or *Unreal Tournament 2004* into a lethal mixture of soccer, handball, rugby, and good old-fashioned destruction. ☛

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN



RED MAGE/BARD

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 60
SUBJOB LEVEL: 30
WADA: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN
WEAPON: ROUNDABOUTS



→ It's been an action-packed month for Milky. Above, Milkman and Alderon saw a Mithra-bound ship full of newbies from the wrath of a Pirate invasion. Solcloud and 16 others (middle) help Milky get his RDM AF hat. Then, Milkman and company successfully defeat Shiva in an Avatar Prime summoner battle (above-bottom).



The word is "sixty," and that's the level I hit this month. A grand level it is, one that takes a lot of work since each step up the level 55-60 ladder is 20,000 experience points deep. But reaching 60 has allowed me to equip the final bastion of a Red Mage's Artifact Gear, called the **Warlock's Chapeau**. With the help of various **Roundabouts**, my level 75 buddy **Solcloud**, other assorted high-level players like **Sydious** (a tarutaru Dark Knight), and a melee-heavy three-party alliance, we were able to kill the required Nightmare Monsters [big bogy **Miser Murphy** in **Fai'Yin** and the hard-hitting **Guardian Statue** in **Garlaige Citadel**], and obtain the items required to earn the hat.

A quick return trip to N. Sandoria triggered a bone-chilling cutscene that, to be perfectly frank, made me proud to be a Red Mage. I'm sure every job has its equivalent cutscene, but without spoiling anything, the cinema for Red Mages makes you feel like a special-forces agent in the world of magic users. Sure, Black Mages do a great job nuking stuff, and White Mages keep you alive, but when you need to pull out the big guns for the most dangerous assignments, nothing solos as well as a Red Mage.



I can't tell you how exciting it is to be a high-level RDM [buffed with **Phalanx**, **Blink**, **Stoneskin**, and **Protect III**] confronted by uber-tough enemies (like **Bloodtear**) hitting me for zero damage. Or unleashing area-of-effect attack spells [perhaps **Firaga** if I'm subbing **BLM**] to decimate dozen of weaker enemies in one or two shots is so much fun, I'm glad I chose to become a member of the RDM Corps. Besides, an RDM fully outfitted in a complete set of Artifact Gear looks absolutely **pimp**. RDMs can heal, use powerful black magic, raise the dead, restore other mages' MP, provide excellent team support, and they can wear heavier armor than other mages, and use both shields and swords. Simply put: RDMs are the red Jedi of **FFXI**.

Of course, leveling up by fighting the same damn crabs and beetles for 40 levels is getting pretty old, which makes me long for the **Chains of Promathia** expansion more than ever. In the meanwhile, planning is going full-steam ahead for my impending marriage to in-game partner, **Wrath**, at an undisclosed location and date. The paparazzi lurk, and only a small handful of friends and Roundabouts will be able to attend. So, stay tuned for more. **James Mielke**



→ The **Guardian Statue** (above) who holds the final key—a pull-puller—toward earning the **Warlock's Chapeau**, has an area of effect attack that can crush your whole party if you're not prepared. Below, Milky helps out a host of White Mages (including **Roundabout**, **Nymy**) battling for their own Artifact body armor, the **Healer's Gilette**, in the depths of **Fai'Yin**, a dangerous area filled with high-level ghosts and undead.





GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD!
HE'S PISSED!

GET ME A POOPEA SCOOPER!

➔ "Hey there, Mr. Geezer! Can we ask you a question?"
Guess what, morons? Ya just did. And I'm annoyed already. So ya might as well ask me another one now. Or you could just put a bullet in my brain instead. That'd take less time and would probably hurt less.

"Wow. That's cranky even for you, Mr. Geezer. What's the matter, sir?"
What's the matter? I'll tell you what's the matter. I'm falling apart, that's what's the matter. Every time I wake up, it's something new. Just yesterday I rolled over and found some kinda purplish lump on my keister. Hurts like hell, too.

"Whoa. That's, uh, one of those 'too much information' things."
Tough! Don't ask next time.

Anyway, that's not really the problem. The real problem is this dang game in my hands right here. "Spider-Man 2? But Mr. Geezer, we've heard nothing but good things about that game! In fact, you guys gave it 8 out of 10 in this very issue!"

Oh, did we? Well, take a closer look at this box, morons. This here is the PC version. The console version—the one for Xbox, PS2, and GameCube owners—now that is a mighty fine game. Me and Mrs. Geezer are having an excellent time with that one on the PS2—especially when we play in the nude! I like to play the "find the controller" minigame with the missus, if you know what I mean.

"That's probably another one of those 'too much information' things, sir."

Yeah, well, anyway, that's the good version. This PC version? Apparently, at Activision, PC stands for "piece of crap." See, some brainiac over there decided that PC gamers wouldn't want the same game console gamers get. No. What they'd want is a dumbed-down, half-assed version with about half the features and none of the fun of the console game. Besides, why port the same great game across all

platforms, which is just kind of boring and logical, when you can go to extra effort to create one very special lame version for one specific platform?!

And that's one thing that PC gamers really needed this year, too—another lousy game. Because the message hasn't quite been getting across that PC gaming is for lepers and losers. It's been too subtle. PC gamers needed some more sand kicked in their faces, just for good measure. Sure, Microsoft, the company whose operating system is the heart and soul of the PC, tried its damndest to get the point across at E3, showing its few measly PC games into a back corner of the two-mile-long Xbox booth, safely hidden away from where anyone might unsuspectingly have to see one. And, sure, the retail stores are doing a great job of making sure that the PC games

continue to occupy even less shelf space than the used SNES games and software anime DVDs. But what PC gamers really needed in 2004 was that final, definitive statement of where they stand in the scheme of things. And with this ridiculous, insulting, completely unnecessary Spider-Man 2 game, they found out just where they stand: in a big steamy pile of manure, that's where!

Bah! ☹



APPARENTLY, AT ACTIVISION, PC STANDS FOR "PIECE OF CRAP."

The views expressed by Game Geezer are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of GMR.



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*The frenzied fight suddenly ceases
Death rushes to the back of the throat*



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